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REV. JOSEPH S. BUCKMINSTER,

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BOSTON.
PUBLISHED BY CARTER AND HENDEE,
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1829.

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Nov. 23, 1829

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The wish has been often expressed by the friends of Mr Buckminster, particularly by those to whom his sermons were first addressed, that a further selection from them might be printed. The volume already published contains many of his most valued sermons, and the friends by whom the choice was made, faithfully discharged their duty to the reputation of Mr Buckminster while subjecting it to the severe test of a posthumous publication. But those who were his hearers are aware, that many of his sermons remained unpublished, not less adapted to the ends of religious instruction, than those contained in the first volume.

In offering to the public a further selection, the friends of Mr Buckminster are therefore confident that they shall make a highly useful addition to the stock of works adapted to promote the best influences of Christianity.

Few collections of sermons have been so favorably received as the former volume, and a firm persuasion is entertained that the additional volume, which is now presented to the christian community, will prove in no degree less acceptable.

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SERMON I.

ON THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD.

ROMANS, XI. 36.

FOR OF HIM, AND THROUGH HIM, AND TO HIM, ARE ALL THINGS.

THERE is no habit of the mind which gives such uniform and equable satisfaction, as that which refers every event in the course of our own, or of others' experience, to God, the only proper agent. In a world so full as this of sudden and strange vicissitudes, it is of great importance to believe, steadfastly and cordially, that no event takes place which has not been foreseen; that no agent, animate or inanimate, operates uncontrolled; and that all the wills of all voluntary beings in creation, are subordinate to the irresistible volitions of the Ruler of creation. It is common enough to hear the providence of God generally and indistinctly acknowledged in extraordinary events, especially in those which bear with them an impressive character of moral retribution. But this is very differ-

ent from that habitual, enduring persuasion of the unlimited and uninterrupted providence of God in everything which attends the Christian in sorrow and in joy, in security and in danger, in private and in public, in our business and our devotions, in youth and in age, in time and in eternity. It might be supposed that the man who had once attained to the grand and impressive conviction that there is a God, would never forget it; that the idea would intrude itself upon every occasion, and be associated with every event. But we find, alas! that it is not so. Everything seems an object of attention, but the being without whose aid we could attend to nothing. Men resort to a thousand inferior and secondary causes, as if it were enough to admit that there is one superior cause, but it is too remote or too incomprehensible to arrest their regard. To account for what we know, we rest upon what we can see, and look not beyond creatures like ourselves, while God sits silently and sublimely at the head of all things, secretly guiding the complicated motions of his universe.

The belief of a providence is of little value, unless it become a habit of the mind. It is of little consequence that we see God in the whirlwind, or in the awful convulsions of nature, if, as soon as the whirlwind has passed over, or the shaking earth is steadfast again, the mighty agent is forgotten. Our religious impressions of God's power, are intended for daily use, and not for extreme

circumstances, or awful and interesting situations. If we acknowledge not God in prosperity, we cannot trust him in adversity; if we see him not in the regular occurrences of nature, we shall be wakened by the extraordinary, only to a sentiment of indistinct and stupifying fear.

Still, however, there are periods in our own lives, and in the affairs of the world, when we pause and feel uncertain of our former convictions. When we see the good and pious defeated in all their plans, always frustrated, and always suffering; the vicious triumphing in prosperity; the unprincipled elevated to power; the infidel boasting himself above every name that is called God, shadows of doubt will at intervals fly across the most pious mind, and sometimes rest long upon the strongest understanding.

It is to revive, and not to generate in your minds, a belief of the supreme control of the great Disposer of events, that I propose now to give you the reasons on which this belief of God's providence is founded.

The general idea of a providence is so clear and so common, that it needs not to be explained. God, we acknowledge, governs the universe. In the motions of the inanimate part of creation his power is easily acknowledged; for, as we know that nothing can move itself, we are ready to admit the impulse of a superior agent. But we see not so clearly how the power of God can extend to the voluntary acts of intelligent beings. Perhaps this

difficulty will be sufficiently removed by simply granting, that, as far as God has given to any class of beings the power of governing themselves, so far his own immediate agency is withdrawn. These, then, he governs by arranging and combining the circumstances in which these beings are placed, and by so overruling and controlling their determinations, that they shall always, directly or indirectly, advance his purposes, and accomplish his designs. It is easy also to discern, that whatever power has the unlimited control of the inanimate part of creation, and determines the situation of the material world, must also have the living world equally at his disposal; for so intimately is every part of nature, animate, inanimate, and rational, connected, and so continually dependent is man upon the influence of exterior objects, that it is instantaneously felt, that whoever has the government of the one, possesses, of necessary consequence, that of the other.

By the providence of God I understand, that all creatures, animate and intelligent, are continued in existence by his power, and furnished by his bounty with the means of preservation; that their station in the scale of being is ordained by his wisdom, the period of their lives terminated by his previous appointment, their number multiplied or diminished by his ordination, and their circumstances, in any period of their existence, precisely those which he determines and circumscribes. By the providence of God I mean, that not one in the vast variety of

events is accidental or fortuitous; that of the continual changes in mind or matter, God is not ignorant, even for a moment; that not a motion in creation takes place which he has not foreseen, or for which he has not provided, or to which he is not present; that the will of every agent is subordinate to his, and accomplishes his purposes; that the situation of every particle of matter, of every insect, bird, beast, man, or angel, or whatever other existences there may be which we know not, is, at every moment of time, precisely that which God ordains, and nothing else. I mean that the world, natural and moral, is never for an instant without an administration. Never is the Supreme Power ignorant or inattentive, never inefficient, never wavering. Whatever appears to resist the will of God, at the same time accomplishes his purposes; whatever cooperates with his will, cooperates not without his knowledge, his direction, his superintendence.

Do you ask me whence I draw these conclusions? I answer, first, from the very nature of God. You acknowledge that he is a spirit. But what is your idea of a spirit? Is it not of something incorporeal, intelligent, and inherently active? Can you imagine an intellectual force universally diffused throughout creation, which is for a moment idle or unemployed? Can that spirit which formed the universe, avoid animating, sustaining, moving, and operating upon it? I cannot conceive of intellect that is inactive. It must be ever in exer-

tion, sustaining existence, producing events, forming purposes, accomplishing designs. I cannot conceive a more unintelligible or unworthy idea of God, than to suppose that he remains inactive at the head of creation, creating worlds, and leaving them to their fate, with a plenitude of power which has been but once exerted, with an unlimited intellect never exercised, never displayed.

Again; the necessary omnipresence of God, proves also his providence. What! is he present at every point of space, and knows not the movements which take place in his universe? Imagine him filling all nature with his influence, extending through all space, moving in all motion, enduring through all duration, animating everything that lives, thinking in all that thinks, acting throughout innumerable worlds in the mutual gravitation which keeps them from rushing into chaos, and can you avoid the conclusion, that his providence extends, with himself, through all nature? Consider that he perceives, at one and the same moment, whatever exists, and whatever changes, and that, at one and the same moment, he exerts the whole of his energy throughout the immense range of creation, and can you for an instant doubt his providence and his government? Is he present and does he not act; or is he present and does he not instantaneously perceive; or does he know, and is his knowledge useless; does he act, and is his agency without foresight or purpose? No, the very term providence, includes the notion of foresight, and

may be illustrated also from the omniscience of Deity, another necessary attribute.

It may be difficult to give you a clear notion of that power by which God embraces within his actual knowledge, the present, the past, and the future. But perhaps your conceptions may be assisted by recollecting that things appear past or present to us, in consequence of the continued succession of our thoughts, passing one at a time through our minds; for thus only we get the idea of duration. But since in the intellect of God, in consequence of its infinite diffusion in every part of creation, innumerable ideas must exist at the same instant, of all that happens in that creation, of course that succession of individual thoughts, which alone furnishes us with the idea of duration, can have no place in the divine mind. For, if we can suppose two ideas to be contemplated at the same precise moment in any mind, we may suppose any indefinite number; the idea of succession is lost. Therefore we may conclude that what to us, and to all beings with minds like ours, appears past, or present, or future, exists simultaneously in the divine mind, comprehended in one glance, present at one and the same moment. This eternal *now*, includes all that we call endless duration; a duration, if I may say so, in the mind of God always instantaneous. Hence he comprehends, at the same moment, the origin, the progress, and the termination of every event; at the same moment the meditated plan, the progress, and the developement of creation; at the

same moment, every motion of every man's will, whether abortive or effectual; at the same moment, the birth, life, and death of every creature now living, or that has ever lived; at the same moment, are present to his mind all the grand eras of history, the most interesting periods of time, the most remotely connected events of the past and of the future. The fate of every man and every angel, of every country and every world, of every unorganized atom, and every organized system, is discerned simultaneously by the great Omniscient, through the successive periods of their continuance. And is all this knowledge without purpose, without wisdom, without design, without use? It cannot be admitted. From the very nature, then, of God, we see the necessity of his providence, the regularity and universality of his administration.

II. The second proof of the government of God's providence is drawn from his being the creator. Can it be supposed, that he who made the universe, lost all interest in it as soon as the act of creation had passed? Would he bestow powers, and not be curious to know how they were exercised? Would he adjust a stupendous system, and not wait to observe its operation? Would he have peopled the world with intelligences, and have taught them to know that they had a celestial father, and then have left them, cast, as it were, upon a desolate island in the boundless ocean of the universe, to struggle through a solitary existence, abandoned by the very being who may be supposed to love

them the most tenderly, because they were the creatures of his power? Suppose it for his glory that they were created; is it not as much for his glory to sustain and control them? Suppose they are prepared for his pleasure; and is his pleasure exhausted at the first view of creation? Did he bring the world and its inhabitants into existence from a principle of benevolence? Suppose this, and it is the only rational hypothesis, and the conclusion is irresistible, that benevolence must be equally engaged in sustaining, guiding, guarding, and perfecting his creation. I appeal to you, ye fathers and mothers. Did your interest in your children cease from the moment that they were ushered into life? Would you leave them from that moment to their fate? I appeal to that interest which you take in their growth, their fortunes, and their end, an interest which increases with their years, and their improvement. And is it to be supposed that a care like this, which in man is esteemed an excellence, is not to be found in the great parent of mankind? 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,' is it to be believed that God has left the world unguarded and unobserved, and that his children are born and die he knows not how, and cares not when? Where is the architect who would leave a nice and curious machine, which was acknowledged to be an illustrious monument of his skill, to fall into disuse and decay, in consequence of his neglect? And has God, the great mechanician, left the

system which he has so curiously composed, to the revolutions of unnumbered ages, undirected by one who can understand its complicated motions, preserve in place its innumerable parts, restore its irregularities, and guide its movements to the grand and glorious purpose for which alone it was constructed?

III. As I am adducing reasons rather than appealing to testimony, it is not my design to bring forward the direct assertions of scripture in favor of the doctrine of this discourse. But I cannot refuse myself this remark, that the single circumstance that a revelation has ever been made to mankind, is an irresistible demonstration of a providence, whatever the character, the design, the reception, or the fate of that revelation may be. It proves that the affairs of men are not overlooked, that God sometimes discerns the benevolent propriety of immediately interposing in the course of events; that the progress of man's character and improvement is not so unalterably fixed by what are called the laws of nature, that it may not sometimes be accelerated by special assistance; and if God's love has ever induced him to overstep what may be called the ordinary limits of his bounty, for the more certain and rapid felicity of his creatures, what may we not conclude respecting the final issue of his universal government of the world?

Again; if it can be shown that a single prophecy has been fulfilled, the same conclusion is irresist-

ible ; for prediction implies the most intimate knowledge of characters and events, with all their connexions, bearings, and dependences ; and whether the prediction is made merely from a foresight of the event, or whether the event is afterwards determined and the circumstances arranged to accomplish the prediction, the conclusion is the same. Look then, I pray you, at the series of prophecies which the scriptures contain, and tell me, can you find nothing there which has been accomplished, nay, nothing which is perhaps even now accomplishing ?

IV. Lastly, let us come to the proof from fact. Look around upon creation and observe the good order of the universe ; powers nicely adjusted, systems accurately balanced, worlds rushing undisturbed with astonishing and noiseless rapidity through fields of immeasurable space, where nothing interferes, nothing stops, but all is inconceivably vast and harmonious, and answer me what preserves this complex wonder of a world ? Is it less necessary that some power should continue, than that some power should have established it ? Whence the regularity of summer and winter, seed-time and harvest ? Is there no care in this ? Whence the unfailing succession of the generations of men ? Whence the ordinary regularity of their numbers, the progressive perfection of the species, the prodigious variety of the individuals, the curiously accommodated circumstances, characters, and stations, of men in the world ? Is there no providence in this ?

But it is not in great operations that the intelligence, and consequently the providence of God is to be most clearly discerned. It is evident in a thousand minute and accurate adaptations of man's nature, and of every other creature's nature to his place in the system.

If you ask why the birds were not placed in the sea, and the fishes in the air, I can give no answer but such is the ordination of their Creator. They were made for the element in which they live, and you may say, if you please, that it was chance that produced this distribution, and believe it if you can.

But the most easy proof of the providence of God in the visible works of his hands, is found, I think, in the power of foresight and anticipation with which man is endowed. We are enabled to look forward into futurity, to provide for what is to come, to form ardent expectations, and cherish reasonable hopes. If God then has given the power to a rational creature to make provision beyond the present moment, does it not prove irresistibly that the bestower of this faculty and this disposition, possesses them in perfection himself, that he knows, and is interested in what is to come, that he has provided beforehand for his creatures? And if his providence extends for a single day, or a single hour, I ask why does it not for every day? why not for eternity? Is there any fallacy in this conclusion?

But perhaps the proof is more striking in the

instincts of animals, where the immediate provision of Heaven is to be seen without the aid of any intermediate intelligence. Whence then does the ant lay up in summer, her winter's food? Do you suppose that she looks forward to that inclement season? Has she a spirit of prophecy? Or does God thus provide without her knowledge for her continued support? And if for her—your own hearts, my hearers, will draw the inference. It has been justly remarked that this instinct is as indisputable an argument for divine providence, as if God by miraculous interposition should annually send an angel to lay up in store for this industrious people, a provision for their future wants.

I should delight, my hearers, to retrace with you the history of the world, and accumulate with you the proofs of God's providence. I should delight to follow with you the footsteps of a Divinity in the mighty revolutions of society, to show you the most important events springing from the most inconsiderable causes, and the ever progressive march of human affairs defeating the predictions of the wisest and proving a great Controller. I would show you good arising unexpectedly from evil, the sure melioration of the world following the most desperate position of human affairs, and the designs of providence abundantly developed. I would show you the dissolution of the mightiest empires terminating in the happiest results; wars, pestilence, and convulsions forwarding the kindest

designs; the knowledge of God continually preserved and continually increasing under circumstances in human estimation the most unfavorable. Especially might I dwell upon the peculiar situation of the Jews, and their miraculous dispersion, with the knowledge which they alone possessed; the fulness of the time in which the Messiah was born, with the extraordinary situation of the world, exactly what it should be, for the best dissemination of his religion.

Then, if more proofs were wanting, I would appeal to every individual's life; and the history of every pious, and I may say, of every impious heart, would testify all things were of God.

From the explanations I have given, and from the course of my remarks, it must have appeared, that there is no foundation for the usual distinction between a general and a particular providence; for so intimate are the mutual dependences of animate and inanimate creation, that no providence can be general, which includes not every individual being, and the same arguments which prove that God takes notice of anything, prove that his providence extends equally to all.

It shall now be my object to deduce some practical reflections from this most interesting subject.

'For of him, and through him, and to him are all things.' How grand then is God! Christians, have you ever contemplated the wonderful magnificence of this controller of the universe? 'Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the

everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, nor is weary?' The human mind, trying to form a conception vast enough to embrace the peculiar grandeur of God, feels the insufficiency of its powers, and finds astonished, how narrow is its boasted capacity! We find that to understand his excellence by a single act of comprehension, we must possess a mind equal to his own. I say then again, how inexpressibly great is that being who penetrates at once the recesses, and circumscribes within himself the boundless ranges of creation; who pierces into the profound meditations of the most sublime intelligence above, with the same ease that he discerns the wayward projects of the child; who knows equally the abortive imaginations and the wisest plans of every creature that ever has thought, or that ever will think, throughout the realms of intellect. How trancendent that mind, to which all other minds are infinitely inferior, from the lofty seraph that stands near his throne, down to the poor ideot who is incapable of forming a conception of his Maker. How vast that comprehension, to which all the sciences of all the ages of the world, are not less simple, nor less intelligible, than the first proposition of the infant's earliest lesson. How wonderful is that power, which wields with equal ease the mightiest, and the feeblest agents; directs the resistless thunderbolt, or wafts a feather through the air; bursts out in the imprisoned lava, or rests on the peaceful

bosom of the lake; rides on the rapid whirlwind, or whispers in the evening air. Think, I pray you, of that wisdom which conducts, at the same moment, the innumerable purposes of all his creatures, and whose own grand purpose is equally accomplished by the failure or by the success of all the plans of all his creatures. Think of him under whom all agents operate, because by him all beings exist. Think of him who has but to will it, and all moving nature pauses in her course, chaos succeeds to the harmony of innumerable spheres, and eternal darkness overwhelms this universe of light. Yet in the midst of darkness his throne is stable, and all is light about the seat of God. 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; for it is high, we cannot attain unto it.'

If the knowledge of God is thus extensive and minute, and his power so irresistible, surely his favor, my friends, must be of infinite importance to every creature upon earth. Suppose you had secured the friendship of every power in the universe, and that even the world of invisible spirits waited upon your orders and guarded your life;—leave but God your enemy, and what is the worth of your security? Let him be but your enemy, and what power on earth or in heaven could protect you? But on the contrary, if he is your friend, you have nothing to fear. The hatred of man is transitory, the love of God is eternal. If all the elements were combined against you, if all your plans were defeated, your sorrows multiplied with

every return of day, and the calumny of every breath in creation poured upon your character, if God is but your friend, princes shall envy you, worldly greatness shall bow to yours, the rich and mighty shall wish to change with you their lot, and the wicked will look up with reverence to the man whom God delighteth to honor. Let God be your friend, and the dark course of your life shall terminate in light, your integrity shall burst out at last like the noonday, and the light of God's countenance shall rest in glory on your head. If God is your friend, all things are yours, whether life or death, things present or to come, time and eternity.

My friends, would to God it were as easy to persuade you to a temper and conduct correspondent to this belief in God's providence, as it is to persuade you of its truth! Forget not, I pray you, that in this great being we live, and move, and have our being; nothing befalls us which he does not accomplish; nothing befalls us which he cannot prevent. He is everywhere; above, below, around; nay, more, he is within us. He knows therefore the secrets of the heart. Love him, then, for what is past; but, whether you may trust him or fear him for what is to come, God only knoweth!

SERMON II.

OUR LOT IN LIFE NOT AT OUR OWN DISPOSAL, BUT ORDERED BY GOD.

PROVERBS, XVI. 9.

A MAN'S HEART DEVISETH HIS WAY; BUT THE LORD DIRECTETH HIS STEPS.

THAT the providence of God extends to the minutest concerns in the life of every man, and that how often soever we may be disappointed or lost in the uncertainties which appear to surround us, God's designs proceed steadily to their accomplishment; and that these designs are invariably benevolent in their progress, though sometimes their tendency is not immediately seen, are truths which have impressed themselves so strongly on my own conviction, that I cannot avoid wishing they may be felt with equal force by you, my christian friends. No man, I think, can have passed half the term of human existence, without discovering, that more than once his projects have been frustrated, his courses altered, his buds of hope blasted, and the lofty fabric of his expectations overthrown, he knows not how, nor whence, nor

wherefore. No man, I think, would venture deliberately to offend the Almighty Disposer of his lot, could he but realize the completeness of his dependence upon him. In the bustle of human exertion, it is almost impossible to keep this sentiment in active and uninterrupted exercise. With a view then of making a pious impression on our hearts, I shall attempt,

First, To show how little our external situation in life has depended on ourselves; and,

Secondly, To prove, that if our circumstances were more at our own disposal, and our wishes more frequently accomplished, we should probably be less happy than we are at present.

To show you how little our lot in the world has been in our own hands, it is not necessary to carry you back to those hours when you were waiting for life, and the little spark of existence, just kindled, was trembling under every passing breath of casualty. It is not necessary to dwell upon the days of your infancy, when it was every minute doubtful whether the being that had been introduced into life, would live long enough to understand that he had a life to preserve. We will pass over those days of boyhood, when the understanding is not ripe enough to form plans, and when the forethought just appearing extends no further than to the pleasures, hardly to the evils of the morrow. We will pass over, too, the remaining years of minority, when the imagination just begins to know its own alacrity, and, fertile in youthful projects, leaps forward from one year to another, of a life

long in prospect, touching every object it meets with the tints of hope. The whole of this early period, though it often gives a lasting color to the remainder of life, is so little within our own power, and is so seldom influenced by any plans which we are then capable of forming, that it would be superfluous to insist longer upon the conclusion we would draw from it.

There is a time, however, when every man begins to feel something of his own self-sufficiency, when we choose the pursuits we mean to follow, mark out what we imagine to be the road to happiness, and, thus prepared, enter on the wide and busy scene of active life. From this period, then, when you think you have taken the thread of your fortunes into your own hands, allow me to follow you a few steps.

The first fact which shows us how little our present situation is the result of our own arrangements, is the innumerable defeats every man's plans encounter. I appeal to any one who has lived long in the world, whether, at any period of his life, he has found himself in the precise circumstances he expected. This certainty of disappointment results from more than one source. In the first place, so various and complicated are human interests, so inordinate are many of our desires, and so unreasonable are others, that two individuals can hardly form extensive plans of conduct which shall not interfere, if not by direct collision, at least in some subordinate parts, so as to affect the issue of the whole. What a range of

disappointment does this single fact open! The success of one half the human race is the partial disappointment of the other. From this single source of disappointment, however real or imaginary—the contrariety of human interests—you see how much of your destiny on earth, is placed at once out of your control.

It would be impossible to enumerate all the causes of the failure of our plans. One, however, which, more perhaps than any other, shows the folly of far extended projects, is the uncertainty of health, a blessing, which is attended with no perceptible sensation of pleasure, but which is indispensable to the full enjoyment of every other pleasure. And is this a good which is within the reach of human foresight? I ask you, young man, who have been forming extensive plans of future eminence, you, who are so busy while the worm of disease is secretly feeding at the seat of life, and sucking the bloom of health from your cheek? I ask you, laborious man of business, whose plans have attained all the excellence, which maturity of mind, long experience, and increasing confidence can give them, have you never felt pains which warn you of your mortality? Have you never laid your head upon the pillow with a foreboding, that tomorrow might sweep you and your projects into oblivion?

What then? Is man the arbiter of his own fate, when the least mite that floats in God's air, may derange the whole system of the human constitu-

tion? Is man the being to forget that his lot is not within his own disposal, when the first breeze may waft pestilence to his heart, and the first exhalation which rises up under his nostrils, may poison the source of his being; and, if he recover, leave him a life of debility, of inactivity, perhaps of pain and misery? Go to the tombstones, and read there the records of human disappointments. The heads which are now mouldering in those narrow cells, once teemed with plans as probable as yours.

A second remark which should satisfy us that our present situation is not the result of our own foresight, is this; that most of the pleasures we have met with in life were entirely unexpected; and, of our successes also, how few have been the direct consequences of our plans? The very phrase good fortune, intimates this. It implies a happiness which was not premeditated, which was not the object of our calculations, not the fair result of any of the plans we had been laboriously forming. How many have vaulted into seats of power, lifted by the agitation of the times, into places to which they once dared not raise a thought? What has raised the men who fill up such a space in history, but who make such blanks in creation, but the combinations of circumstances, which they never foresaw, and tides in human affairs, upon which they never calculated?

But it is not necessary to mount so high for examples. Enumerate, I beseech you, the pleasant

circumstances of a single day, and tell me how many of them came within your anticipations? What are the pleasures which constitute the ordinary, therefore I may say the principal happiness of human life, and attach us so strongly to existence? Are they not the little, domestic, unsought comforts, which one man enjoys almost as well as another? And was it for these common pleasures of life, that you have been all along spreading your nets? No, my friends, acknowledge it was not. It was for the glittering, the envied, the distinguished blessings. You thought you should be miserable if you did not obtain these, and so you would have been, had not the All-wise Disposer of human affairs ordered better the sources of human happiness. If he had left us to look out for all the little circumstances that make life agreeable, the whole of human felicity would be lost in the toil and weariness of providing for it. No, my friends, the prodigious variety of little circumstances, which make up the daily comforts of life, is not what we seek, but what meets us every hour. Happiness is like the invisible, elastic fluid, which we breathe. If we were compelled to seek the pure air which supports respiration, our breath would be soon exhausted in the pursuit.

A third remark only will I make, to add to the weight of proof, that our actual situations in life have been much less in our power, than the show of human activity would lead us at first to suppose. If you have passed the meridian of your

days, I am sure you are sensible that no unvarying plan has hitherto conducted you. Ask that old man, who has approached so feebly the term of his life, and is now looking back upon the days as they roll away behind him; ask him, how often he has changed his courses, how often he has measured back his steps. Ask him, if much of the short period which is allotted to this busy life, has not been spent in recovering what has been lost, in framing new speculations, in guarding against new defeats, in altering even what once appeared to be his ultimate views. It is indeed often supposed that much of the misfortune of human affairs is the consequence of the instability of our purposes, and the perpetual changes of our plans. But perhaps the very contrary is often the case. For who has not found, that, by an obstinate adherence to his own plans, or too great confidence in the infallibility of former conclusions, opportunities are continually lost, and many a life worn out in discontentment, and hopes never realized, which might otherwise have been conducted in triumph under the banners of success? What then is the conclusion from this fact? that, in order to secure the greatest prosperity, it is necessary to change often our pursuits, and even our ultimate views? Or is it not this; that in consequence of the narrowness of our comprehension, our best plans are so liable to defeat, that it is absurd in any case to say, that the situation in which we find ourselves, is the direct result of our own contrivance, and of course that our lot in life is at our own disposal?

The second division of our subject now calls for our attention. In this I proposed to show you, that even if our circumstances in life were more at our own disposal, and our views more frequently accomplished, we should find that we had consulted our own happiness much less frequently and successfully, than it is now provided for, by what we call the uncertainties and accidents of life.

No doubt most men, at the close of their days, imagine, that if they were to begin life again, they should conduct it with more prudence, and probably with greater success. But even this common sentiment we know to be extremely fallacious. How much more doubtful, then, or erroneous are the notions of those, who are entering into life, and who imagine, that if they were once permitted to make their own fortunes, they should infallibly make their own felicity!

In this age of accumulation, the majority perhaps of mankind, if allowed to have their first wish, would place themselves immediately in the possession of wealth. A few might be found of moderate designs, but most men would rush at once into opulence, under the vain expectation that they were ensuring a perpetuity of good, in every treasure they deposited for future supply. As soon, however, as the first flush of acquisition is over, if you ask them whether they have found that wealth is happiness, they will tell you that they have made a deplorable mistake. They will

tell you, that they have found, to their astonishment, that the care of preserving property was as painful as the anxiety of procuring it, and that to possess was not to enjoy. They will tell you, that they have found innumerable pleasures which wealth did not assist them to enjoy, many which it strangely interrupted, and a few from which it had completely excluded them. Recollect, too, my friends, that this person, whom we have now allowed to choose his situation *in* life, has chosen it *for* life. He is to be a rich man, a rich man only, and a rich man forever. Infallible disposer of your own lot! you shall be allowed another trial.

Your ruling passion, then, is fame. Let my life, you say, be short, if it be but brilliant. I will live, though but for an hour here, yet will I live in the admiration of posterity; though seen, and gazed at but for a little time by my cotemporaries, I shall return, like a comet, in the revolutions of centuries, to be the wonder of a remote generation. Riches, I disdain, for they are accessible to any man; health, I am proud to sacrifice; power, I value not, except as it belongs to mind; station, in the common interested grades of society, I am ashamed to aspire to; mind is my kingdom; obscurity only is my dread; to be unknown, is what alone can make me miserable. A life may be celebrated even because it is short. Let me float, though it be but a day, a beautiful meteor on the breath of popularity. I have chosen my lot in life. Grant

my wish, and I am happy. Vain man! it is granted. You are envied, depreciated, sacrificed. Pale, with the laurels round your brow, you have succeeded; but success cannot restore the color of health, which the anxiety of being applauded, has worn away from your cheek. Your temper, too, is ruined; you have become unnaturally sensitive to every word or look which threatens you with censure; painfully jealous of those whom you ought to love; insensible of the clearest worth of your competitors; consumed with a feverish thirst for admiration, or swollen with a solitary pride, which shuts you out from half the pleasures of sympathy, and from half the joys of benevolence. This world, then, is no longer agreeable than while it praises you; therefore you make friends with the next generation, which shall neither love nor hate, neither flatter nor betray you. This, then, is the portion you have chosen; to be applauded, instead of being loved, to be proud, instead of being happy, and you are rewarded by the unsubstantial honors in the gift of posterity, instead of the personal attachment of the generation in which you live. Do not say, my young friend, that I have deserted my first supposition, and that all this wretchedness is the attendant, not of fame attained, but of fame anxiously desired. The objection would be satisfactory if the love of fame were a passion which could be quenched by the attainment of its objects. No, its appetite grows by what it feeds on.

It would be superfluous to mention more of cases, which are so easily imagined. It is plain that if we were allowed to choose our future lot, we should all prefer some change from our present situation. This man would put himself forward a step in the ranks of society, and that would grasp at a little more power; one would seek, as we have supposed, for fame, another for wealth; some would choose uninterrupted health, and its attendant activity; others would prefer inactivity, quietness, security, and ease. But how is it that all these sagacious arbiters of their own destiny have failed in the attainment of a common object? How is it, my friends, that if left to ourselves, we should consult our own happiness less than it is already consulted by the uncertainties, the disappointments, the casualties of the present arrangement of human affairs? The reason is simply this; that happiness does not consist in external circumstances. Of course, arrange your situation in life as you please; surround yourself with wealth, power, influence, fame; still, if you bring not with you the temper most proper for your situation, you have lost, rather than gained, by the privilege you have exercised. Such is the wisdom of God's providence, that the temper most proper for every situation, can be formed only by feeling the very uncertainty on which that situation is granted.

I cannot leave this division of my subject, without indulging some further speculations, on the

wisdom of these apparently uncertain arrangements of Providence.

However paradoxical it may appear, I will venture to assert, that if the formation of our moral characters depended less than it now does upon unforeseen circumstances, in other words, if the virtues which men sometimes exhibit, were placed more easily within their own power, we should probably be not only less happy, but even less virtuous than we now are. It is not too bold to suggest that even a man under the influence of a pure moral principle, and aspiring after eminent attainments in goodness, if left to choose his own character, would neither consult his own true worth, nor his best happiness. We should see him carried away with false estimates of particular excellences.

One man, transported with lofty notions of patriotism, or glowing with the flame of universal benevolence, to attain the moral reputation he most desired, would bend all the powers of his mind, and accommodate all the affections of his heart, to exhibit a character like Washington's or Howard's. Yet this man, though burning with a pure ambition of excellence, being unable to conceive completely, what constitutes the perfection of this or that virtue, and not placed in precisely the situation of his model, would find himself ridiculous at the very summit of his attainments. He would find, that in his wild pursuit of these splendid virtues, his private and particular affections had suffered. He would find, that what he had gained in universal

philanthropy, he had lost in individual sympathy, and you would probably discern that he was a less affectionate son, a less careful parent, a less useful private citizen. If patriotism or universal benevolence were to become his passion, you would find him sacrificing the great laws of mutual justice, to the imagined interests of his own country, or of the world at large; and his moral sense, which was once a nice test of right and wrong in human actions, would be destroyed by too great familiarity with the maxims of national policy, or with the speculations of universal benevolence. Thus we may venture to predict, that this man, when arrived at the summit of the excellence he most earnestly sought, would in fact be a man of less moral worth, than if his character had been left to be formed by the plastic power of the common situations, uncertainties, disappointments, and casualties of life.

I will suppose another case, in which a man shall be permitted to choose his own character. It is that of one impressed with a deep sense of the importance of religious opinions. He looks around on the world, and his heart aches, when he views the creatures of God perishing in ignorance of what, he thinks, can alone constitute their felicity. He glows with a zeal which to him appears the purest of human passions.

If he were to choose the character he would exhibit to the world, it would be that of a man passionately devoted to the progress of religious opin-

ions. Nay, more, he would establish the character to which he aspires, if it were necessary, by marching cheerfully to the stake, and dying a martyr in the cause of his God. He is afraid of incurring the suspicion of lukewarmness, and would change any situation in life, if he could open a wider field for the exercise of his zeal. But take care that you are not too impatient to burst the limited sphere in which God has placed you. Your zeal, if it had all the scope you wish, might break out into passion; your deep sense of the value of religious opinions might tread on the brink of uncharitableness, and your ardor for reform, might, if your station would admit of it, lead you to reform by persecution, instead of persuasion. No, my friend, trust the shaping of your character in the hands of Providence. He has placed you in circumstances where you are obliged to love men with whom you differ, and to cooperate with men, whom you burn to reform. Sometimes God cools your ardor in his own cause by disappointments, for which you cannot account; sometimes he places you in situations which you find it difficult to accommodate to your principles of conduct, and opens to you views which make you doubt the infallibility of your own conclusions. In short, God, by the circumstances and connexions in which you have been placed, has made you truly useful, whereas you might have been only zealous; he has kept you candid, when you might have been uncharitable; he has given you influence on-

ly, where you wanted power, and has preserved you a mild example of the excellence of his religion, when your own enthusiasm might have dishonored the cause you had espoused, or your passions have led you to the stake, a vain and unprofitable martyr.

Indulge me, my friends, with one supposition more on this subject, and I have done.

Here is a man, whose ruling passion is honor. If he were allowed to fashion his own reputation, he would be distinguished for an excessive sensibility which feels a stain as it would a wound. Influenced by the contemplation of imaginary characters, he endeavours to form himself after the model of heroes he has admired in history, or characters that he has contemplated in the lustre of romance. But as soon as this man enters into the world of actual existences, he finds that he has been preparing himself for a different sphere. He finds that the every day virtues of sober and industrious citizens meet with a better reception, than all the refinements of superior spirits, with the light of which he hoped to encircle his character. He begins to suspect that he has fashioned his feelings for a state of society which it is the amusement of romancers only to pourtray, and of enthusiasts to imagine, and that he has lost much of the happiness which he might have found in this mixed world, merely by seeking for beings which do not yet exist, and cherishing expectations, which the ordinary race of his companions will delight to disap-

point. He will wish in vain, that he had been cast from his youth among the roughnesses and disappointments of life, that he might have acquired a disposition adapted to the world in which he is to bustle; and if God should once more allow this child of refinement to choose the character he would sustain in life, you would find him seeking for happiness in the customary track of human virtues.

You will recollect, my friends, that in the beginning of this discourse we hoped to establish two conclusions. First, that God alone disposes of our lot in life; and secondly, that his arrangements are made with the kindest intentions toward every individual. These conclusions are most interesting, most important, and most consolitory.

Let us bow at the feet of the Omniscient Being who orders our circumstances in life, and say, O God! I am ashamed of my pride, my discontent, and my vain expectations. I have been disappointed in life, but it was thou who didst disappoint me, and I murmur not. I have been fortunate, but it was thy blessing which gave this unexpected success to my projects, and I am humble. If my plans had always succeeded, they would have interfered with the wise arrangements of thy providence, and merely for my partial good, disconcerted the profound and extensive operations of thy wisdom and beneficence. When I look back upon my life, I see that thou hast trained me up in the sure and progressive order of thy

providence, to the character and the hopes, which I now possess. When I have thought myself abandoned, thou hast been watching me with paternal care; when I supposed myself most miserable, I have found myself nearer to the acquisition of the only permanent good. The very circumstances of my life, which I thought the most inauspicious, I find the most favorable, and the very trials, which I thought would terminate in my misery or death, I now find had the most benevolent tendency, the most cheerful conclusion. My expectations have been often defeated, and my views altered, but I still find myself crowned with loving kindness, and surrounded with opportunities for virtue and happiness. In all the events of life, then, I will bless thee. Though the fig-tree should not blossom, and there should be no fruit in the budding vine of my hopes, yet will I bless the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation. I have trusted thee for this life, and with sentiments like these, in continual exercise, may I not trust thee, O God, for eternity?

SERMON III.

ON THE EVIDENCES OF A RETRIBUTION FOR SIN.

ROMANS, II. 16.

IN THE DAY WHEN GOD SHALL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN BY JESUS CHRIST, ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL.

THE doctrine of a future judgment and consequent retribution after death, is the first principle of all religion, and the foundation of all religious obedience. It supposes a power above us, which observes, while it upholds; a being from whom nothing in our character, or conduct, or destiny is hidden, and to whom it will be as easy to assign with equity our future condition, as it was to appoint our present lot. It supposes that we are here on trial for eternity, that we know our obligations and our powers, and that we must hereafter render an account of our conduct. If it were true that the revelations which God has given us, had not expressly declared that there would be a day of judgment for every moral agent, it would not be the less probable; for the whole system of Christianity and the whole language of

the scriptures proceed on the supposition of such a retribution; and, whatever there may be of figure and embellishment in the descriptions which the gospel contains of this solemn proceeding; whether the whole of this great transaction will be finished in one literal day, or the whole world be congregated in one great assembly; the substantial truth of the doctrine is not affected, that God will hereafter judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, and render to every man according to his works.

There is a solemnity in this doctrine which nothing in religion surpasses, and a reasonableness in it which commends it to the wants and best judgments of men. No man can have lived long in the world and not felt the secret conviction that a day will come when the inequalities of present fortune will be rectified, and the righteousness of God be displayed. Let us devote this day to the contemplation of this great doctrine of the gospel.

In reflecting upon it, we shall first attempt to observe some of the numerous indications of a moral government already commenced in the world;

Secondly, from the imperfect degree to which it is here carried, notice the strong presumption we have for believing that it will be at some time completed;

Thirdly, observe the assurance which the gospel gives us, that such a judgment and retribution will take place hereafter.

First, then, we are to attend to some of the numerous indications of a moral and judicial government already commenced in the present state.

To a reflecting mind there can be no doubt that there is a God who judgeth in the earth, or, in other words, that we are under a moral government. The very idea of the thing is almost sufficient to prove that such a government exists; for whence should the notions of right and wrong, merit and demerit, reward and punishment, arise, except from that constitution of things in which God has placed us? That course of providence or discipline, which generates the idea of virtue, and gives it its good character in our minds, indicates the intention of that God who loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity. To the same point also tend many of the institutions of society. Civil government is to be regarded as an ordinance of God for the terror and punishment of evil doers, and a security and encouragement to them that do well. The punishment of the wicked, and the restraints of the ill disposed, however imperfectly effected by this institution, are yet to be regarded as a general effect, indicating the moral intention of God, who ruleth in the earth. The same intention is also intimated to us in the universal impression of parental authority, although, like civil government, it is too often imperfectly administered.

A more sensible indication of the moral government of God we find in the sentiment which offences against society naturally excite in observ-

ers. It is not merely a sentiment of fear, which is excited by the evil doer, but one of indignation and contempt, even when he has escaped the penalty of human laws. It does not destroy the proof which these sentiments furnish of a moral constitution, to say, that they are the effect of education, or of a refined state of society; because, if the Author of our being has so constituted the nature and circumstances of all his creatures, that these sentiments are always generated in the course of man's social existence, this fact is enough to entitle us to call it a moral provision, indicating the judicial government of God, by which he inflicts punishment on the offenders against society. Besides this retribution from society, there is a punishment provided for personal vices in the consequences which follow them in the frame of the human body; and there is no excess which is not closely, or remotely pursued by its natural retribution, weakness, disease, and death.

But the most important witness of the moral and judicial government of God, is undoubtedly to be found within the mind itself. When we speak of conscience, every man knows what we mean; for its tribunal is within him, and this vicegerent of the divine justice exercises a power, from which it is impossible entirely to escape, though it is sometimes silenced, corrupted, or deceived. This it is, which makes cowards of the most abandoned in the hour of death, which flashes its light into the most secret retreats of the guilty, and breathes an

acknowledged horror over the prosperity of the wicked. This it is, which renders the face of nature horrible to the man, who bears about with him the worm that never dies; this is the avenger, which waits only for a moment of solitude, or an interval of retirement, to make the proudest and most important of villains weary of life, and if it find him never alone, pursues him even in his dreams, and terrifies him with visions of the night. It is a rewarder also, as well as a punisher; an approver, as well as a condemner. It is regarded not merely as a strong indication of the divine government, but as constituting the most extensive and effectual provision which God has made for the administration of justice; and there is no man who has ever fallen under its sentence, who will not confess that it is the minister as well as the interpreter of divine justice.

Has your conscience ever reproached you? Did it not then, at that very moment, lift a corner of the veil which is yet drawn over this scene of future judgment? Every public oath, every faltering perjury, every dying confession, every prayer for mercy, every face pale with falsehood, and every wild look of despair is an appeal which our reason acknowledges, to this future tribunal.

When Paul was reasoning of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled. The rising of the procurator from his seat, was itself a proclamation, loud as the voice of the inspired apostle, that the doctrine which he taught

was no chimera. But if the Roman governor chooses, let him refer these suggestions of his troubled mind to the class of superstitious delusions, and maintain that these suggestions do not demonstrate such a retribution as the apostle was preaching. Be it so then; and let Felix take his seat again, and demand another proof; for conscience, though it makes us cowards, does not always make us believers. Let the trial then of the innocent proceed. Let the judge, who has the preacher in his power, proceed to pass his iniquitous sentence, and cut off at once the argument and the life of the apostle. Nay, more; let him retire now with his guards, and ask, where is this judgment of which the prisoner prated so long? Now call in the spectators of this injustice, the sufferers under his administration; show the plunder which Felix has collected, the villages smoking under his rapacious edicts. Let them hear the cries of his innocent victims, and the loud appeals to Heaven, from every part of Judea, against the cruelty of the unprincipled procurator; and then ask them whether Paul's doctrine is true, and you will hear another answer.

It appears, then, whatever credit we may refuse to give to the language of our own consciences on this subject, we are ready to believe in a retribution to come, when we ourselves suffer injustice, or when we see, as well as feel, the inconveniences of the imperfect retribution of the present life. These are arguments which strike the most obtuse

understandings, and many a man who doubts of a doctrine taught him by his conscience, will have no longer a doubt, when the same doctrine is presented to him by his sufferings, or by his passions.

Besides the reproaches of conscience, there are the pangs of mind attendant on particular evil passions, such as the pinings of envy, the heat of rage, the goadings of ambition, and the fears of avarice, all of which are indications of a moral constitution, and are avengers of the divine laws.

These proofs of a moral and judicial government are much more numerous than a superficial glance at society would lead any man to suppose. God has everywhere innumerable instruments at his disposal, and the methods by which he may punish offenders here on earth are various, far beyond our imagination ; and, let us never forget, that the process may be going on in the mind, when it is yet utterly imperceptible to others. We should not be so much disposed to doubt the equity of the divine administration, and to regard this world as a scene where vice is often unpunished, and virtue unrewarded, if we were not so much dazzled by external circumstances as to regard men's visible condition as the indication of their happiness. We wonder that the lightning does not blast the murderer, or the earth open and swallow up the blasphemer, and cry 'Doth not God see ?' when, if we will but think, we shall be satisfied that there is a secret, gradual, and certain process continually going on within, which is the

natural retribution which God has appointed, and which is quite as decided an indication of a moral government, to those who will attend to it, as if the earth opened, or the thunderbolt fell. God indeed causes his sun to shine, and his rain to descend on the just and on the unjust. He does not give us a visible sign from heaven to resolve our perplexities; but, if we will look within, we shall find the sign we want.

The circumstances we have now enumerated are abundantly sufficient to prove the commencement of a moral and judicial government. Indeed men do not in general deny it. They see the characters written on the wall, and it is only when interest or passion deceives them, that they fail to discern that there is a God who judgeth in the earth, and that we are accountable to his government.

It may seem extraordinary that we should have taken so much pains to show the commencement of a retribution here, as a preliminary to the proof of a retribution hereafter. Why not come at once to the arguments for a future life and judgment? But it ought to be considered that it is only from the indications of a moral government here, that, exclusive of revelation, we can infer the probability of any retribution hereafter; it is from its commencement here, that we expect its continuance, and from its imperfect dispensation in this world, that we infer its completion and perfection in another.

II. We come then to our second head, where it is our object to prove that while there are so many circumstances to demonstrate the existence of a moral and judicial government in the world, there are certain facts which compel us to believe that its execution is here incomplete, and that the apparent inequalities will be rectified. From among these numerous inequalities and defects I will mention only one, which strikes me with peculiar force.

It is very easy to find reasons why virtue and piety should here be exposed to affliction. It not only tries, but it confirms the force of a virtuous mind; and I have no hesitation in saying that such a state as ours, where there is one event alike to the righteous and the wicked, is perfectly proper as a state of probation. Indeed I know not how any great degree of virtue could exist, where there was no principle of religious faith in a retribution to come; and this could not, and would not be, if temporal reward and punishment easily and equitably followed every degree of virtue and vice. But though such a condition as our present state, is undoubtedly calculated to form virtue, it is not a state so well calculated to reward it, nor to punish vice. A state of probation therefore infallibly conducts us to a state of retribution.

The instance which we were about to observe as a strong indication of some future day of recompense, is this. There are numerous exam-

ples of good men suffering, on the very account of their piety and integrity, from the hands of the wicked. Now, how much soever such trials may exercise and improve the character of the sufferer, yet, exclusive of a life to come, such virtue not only seems not to meet with any adequate recompense, but does not appear to answer any purpose of wisdom and goodness, but to be punished with misery and destruction. Let it be admitted that the sufferings of the good man have contributed to form his virtue; yet, if there be no future recompense, for what is it formed? To be destroyed? What! a harvest which has sprung from religion, the very root and principle of which is faith in God, and the hope of the life to come, and yet he, who doth nothing in vain, hath formed such virtue in vain? Impossible! What we know and have seen of God will not allow us to believe this disappointment, or that those who have fallen in the cause of virtue have perished.

And, on the other hand, although, as we have shown before, the common degrees of vice find their retribution in the very constitution of human nature, and the course of providence, yet we all know that the most hardened depravity is often the most easy. The greatest excesses are perpetrated by men who have lost the sense of shame, the fear of the laws, and the power of conscience. Surely it cannot be that the most thorough wickedness and the most eminent virtue are unprovid-

ed for in the administration of Providence. No reflecting man can believe this. The reward of those, who, by their uncommon fidelity to virtue, lose its ordinary advantages here, is not then lost, but only reserved.

III. We come now to the third division of our discourse, in which we intended to inquire what revelation says on this subject. We shall find that our Saviour not only declares most explicitly a retribution to come, but also describes, in language suited to our finite comprehension, the mode in which it will be dispensed.

Indeed it may seem almost superfluous to quote from the scriptures, in support of this doctrine; for, upon the supposition of its truth, all the instructions of our Saviour and his apostles proceed. It was to bring it to light that our Saviour came into the world; it is on his death, and after resurrection, that the strongest proof of our future life is raised; and if we were called upon to give a summary of the gospel itself, I know not how it could be more compendiously stated, than to say, that God will assuredly raise mankind to another life, and judge them according to their works, by Jesus Christ.

'I saw the dead,' says the author of the Book of Revelation, 'stand before God, small and great; and the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.' We have in other places a description of the future retribution

in the forms of a judicial trial. How far this language is accommodated to our apprehensions, and derived from the forms of human tribunals, I presume not to say. He, however, will not have a less powerful and religious conception of this final account, who considers the book in which our actions are recorded as the mind of God, who sees at a glance all that is past, present, and to come; and that the division of the assembled universe to the right and to the left hand of the Judge, is an expression of the distinction, the everlasting distinction, of the character and fate of the righteous and the wicked.

Let us consider a few more of the scriptural delineations of this great event, remembering that whether they be understood literally or not, is of no importance as to the reality of the fact, or the final issue of the event; for this much is certain, that after death there will be a judicial dispensation of rewards and punishments, and that every soul will be punished or rewarded, in whatever manner this may be, according to the good or the evil of his past life.

We have the most particular account of this day of judgment given by our Saviour himself, in the twentyfifth chapter of Matthew. Another very intelligible description of the diversity of the rewards in the future life, we have, in the parable of the talents, which it is unnecessary to repeat. 'We must all appear before God,' saith St Paul, 'that every one may receive according to the

things done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil.'

For the day is coming, when every eye shall see him who was once on earth in suffering and humility, despised and rejected of men; but when he shall appear it shall be in power and great glory; for the Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven with a shout, and with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God. In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, those who are alive shall be changed. The men who shall call upon the rocks to shelter and the mountains to crush them, shall find the hills melt, and the foundations of the earth, and all nature passing away like a scroll. Watch, then, for ye know not the day, nor the hour. And however we may amuse ourselves with the thought, that these desriptions are accommodated to our gross and finite apprehensions, and that the literal language of the scriptures will not be accomplished, of this fact we have all the assurance which the word of God can give us, that we must stand before him, to receive according to the deeds done in the body; and then the wicked shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power, and the righteous shall enter to his joy, and live forever with Jesus Christ, in those mansions which he is preparing, and which were designed for them before the foundations of the world. 'What I say unto you,' then, in the words of our Lord, 'I say unto all, Watch.'

SERMON IV.

THE DISCLOSURES OF THE FUTURE JUDGMENT.

ROMANS, II. 16.

IN THE DAY WHEN GOD SHALL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN BY JESUS CHRIST, ACCORDING TO MY GOSPEL.

OUR remarks this afternoon will relate to the great importance of the doctrine, which we considered this morning, of a future judgment, especially when it is viewed as a revelation of the secrets of all hearts.

When we reflect on the insufficiency of human laws, the vast sum of evil against which human legislation cannot provide, and the vast amount of good for which this world and its laws neither offer nor procure a recompense, we feel the importance of this doctrine of a judgment to come. When we are impatient at the long resounding groans of a land in bondage, and the inquiry is awakened whether there is not verily a reward for the righteous, let us consider that these are visible and public evils; but let us ask also, what shall be the retribution for all that hy-

pocrisy, which has enjoyed the favor of the world? What shall be the fate of those who have escaped the detection of all but their own consciences? Shall there be no account taken of those sinful inclinations, which have never ripened into acts; of those wicked intentions, which death or accident has frustrated; no retribution for ingratitude, treachery, and many other offences of which neither the tribunal of public opinion nor of public law, is empowered to take cognizance?

Let us remember also, that the laws of society are full of threats and penalties, but barren of rewards. They repress only the greatest crimes, and have no recompense for the greatest virtues. The world offers little encouragement for secret and unpretending goodness. Will there not then be a day of judgment, when it shall not be forgotten who have secretly cast their mite, even all their living, into the treasury of human virtue and happiness?

The doctrine of a God, from whom nothing is hidden, and whose future judgment no creature can escape, is the very keystone of all the religions in the world. Take it away and society becomes a desolate mass of ruins. While then we feel the value of this doctrine as Christians and believers in God, what shall we think of those men, who, because they will not listen to the declarations of the Son of God, are yet willing, not only to despoil the believer of his hope, but see, without alarm, the foundations of human virtue bro-

ken up, and all the fidelity of promises, the force of oaths, and every hold which truth and virtue give us upon one another, left to the protection of an undefined and variable sense of honor, which is, to say the most, as perishable as the creatures whom it governs.

Thus much we have thought proper to repeat of the truth and importance of this doctrine, not because your faith in it is weak, but to prepare you for the consideration of that circumstance mentioned in the text, that God will, in that day, judge the secrets of men. Leave out but this single fact, that the secrets of all hearts shall then be revealed for the purpose of an equitable decision, and we leave out the most interesting and solemn of the circumstances which attend the scene of judgment.

What a day will that be, which shall uncover the vast repository of human secrets? which shall lay bare the concealed crimes, the forgotten follies, and the unacknowledged motives of all the thoughtless actors in this busy world; the hidden purposes, wishes, fears, sorrows, and miseries of every creature that has ever been endowed with thought; the unregarded virtues, the ill requited goodness, the undervalued worth of the children of heaven; in one word, which shall expose all that man has loved, all that he has dreaded, desired, or intended! The thought is too great for us to feel its force, and we must attend to it in parts, that, by enumerating, we may strengthen rather than weaken the force of the persuasion.

Then shall God expose to view the many deliberate acts of hypocrisy, which have defied all human scrutiny. Then it will be seen what trusts were broken, what perjuries committed, and what equivocations were contrived by the deceitful dealer, to amass and keep his illgotten wealth; for his wealth will then no longer purchase him concealment and security. Then will the testimony of those who have been taken off by secret violence, rise in one dreadful reclamation before the tribunal of eternal justice, and the groans of the injured and forgotten overwhelm the triumphant oppressor. Then will those dazzling and awe-commanding crimes, which have deluded the whole world, be laid bare to the indignation of the meanest sufferer from the oppression of the usurper. Then will many an object of mistaken admiration be exposed; the formal saint who believed nothing; the smiling calumniator who meant nothing; the unprofitable man who did nothing but purchase, by his professions, a temporary estimation. Then will the false witness, and the corrupt judge, the incendiary and the hidden criminal, whether small or great, stand revealed in the light of his countenance, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and whose understanding is infinite.

Then will be disclosed the motives of those actions which have either received the applause of mankind, or been the subject of doubtful or timid condemnation. We shall see at what the patriot aspired, when he pushed himself into the notice

of his countrymen; what the orator meant when he poured out his honied words; and the preacher when he awakened the hopes or fears of his auditory. Then the public declarations of those who directed the affairs of the times in which they lived, and changed the fortunes of a nation, will be compared with their purposes and wishes, and the history of the world be read, not in the page of the eloquent historian, but in the records of eternal truth.

Then shall be known also, wherefore the believer in Christianity has been ashamed to profess it, and how far the multitude of professors have acted up to their profession. Then it shall be discovered how much of all the vast contributions of charity in the christian world, has been given not grudgingly and of necessity, and how much of all that has been bestowed on the relief of human misery, was truly given to relieve it.

Then shall men be made known to themselves. To every individual his own character will be revealed which had been so often, and so strangely misapprehended by himself. These discoveries indeed will be enough to cover the best of men with temporary confusion; for when we come to understand the strange mixture of the motives which have governed us, the confusion of better and meaner principles, of zeal with passion, of humility with disappointed ambition, good conscience with spiritual pride, charity with the desire of estimation, love of truth with love of par-

adox, integrity with obstinacy, honor with base fear, correct sentiment with pride of opinion, love of peace with indolence and cowardice, and vanity, that most delusive of our motives, with all the rest, the best man will be astonished, and the worst be terrified at the labyrinths of his own character.

But there is yet another, and a deeper abyss of secrets to be broken up, and that is, of the before unknown and unacknowledged miseries of humankind. What a sound of groans issues at this opening of the depths of human sorrows; how many voices, hardly ever heard before, now utter their piercing cries before the assembled universe. Now shall be seen how much more impartial has been that moral retribution here on earth, than we had ever imagined, and how unfounded have been our accusations of providence for the apparent inequalities of its distribution. For then will be revealed the secret worm which has been gnawing for years in many a proud heart; and the unacknowledged fears which have pursued the wicked; and the dismay which, in the hour of danger and of death, has overwhelmed many a secret sinner, will now betray itself to the observer.

Then will be revealed the many vexations which men have made for themselves by their evil and dissocial humours; the secret stings of impotent resentment, the long concealed gnawings of envy, the mortifications of vanity, and the wastings of discontent; the distressing doubts of many a profound philosopher and boasting freethinker, and

the secret mournings of many an awakened conscience. Then will be shown the long roll of domestic vexations, the fruits of evil humour, the secret sorrows of parents, the sleepless nights of those, who, with narrow means, have many to provide for, and the still more painful watchings of those who have had the care of great estates. Then will be revealed the unacknowledged pangs of jealousy, of hopeless love, the stings of falsehood,

> 'And hard unkindness' altered eye
> That mocks the tear it forced to flow,'

the spectres which have haunted the sleep of the weak, and the steps of the guilty; and last of all, the horrors which many, whom the world has envied, have met, when they entered on the valley of the shadow of death.

Then, too, will be revealed innumerable purposes which have been formed, and left unexecuted. Then shall we know the plan of life which the young man, cut off in the midst of his days, had drawn for himself; the dreams of the speculator; the visions of the scholar; the hopes of parents for their children; and the aspirations of those who had just begun to take a part in the contentions of the times. Then will be known how much evil has been intended, which accident has frustrated, how much good has been promised, of which the promise was forgotten, how much amendment resolved upon, but defeated by delay.

What a pitiable spectacle then will be presented of half honest confessions, unexecuted resolutions, and of sins almost forsaken! What a scene will open upon the recollection of every one of us, of expectations never answered, wishes never acknowledged, pursuits never fully approved, or faintly followed; and progress always intended, but never made.

But will all the disclosures of that tremendous day be of this painful, and melancholy character? I hope not, my hearers! When this assembly shall stand before the tribunal of omniscient retribution, I hope we shall find there revealed some good deeds, and some good intentions, which were not before known, and which God will confirm by the records of his book of life. Let us hope that many a character will then be cleared up, which is now clouded by the suspicions of a censorious world, and that many will awake and shake themselves from the dust, and put on their beautiful garments, because their warfare is accomplished, and their time of redemption is come. Then it shall be known with what patience and humility many followers of our master have waited for this day; and the secret alms, the drops of water given to the parched lips of the sufferer, the secret prayers put up for others, the secret sorrows of the righteous for those vices and miseries they could not prevent, in short, all that humble virtue which was hardly known to the virtuous himself, will then be revealed, not to magnify the authors,

but to vindicate the equitable providence of God, who is the eternal patron of truth and righteousness.

It is also one of the affecting circumstances of this scene of retribution, that the Lord Jesus Christ will remember what his friends and disciples will have forgotten; they will be insensible, or rather surprised at the deeds of which he reminds them, and say, 'when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee, or thirsty, and gave thee drink, or naked, and clothed thee, or sick and in prison, and came unto thee? Then shall the judge say unto them, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' What a scene of recompense is this! Can we hope, my hearers, that we shall then be reminded of good deeds forgotten, and informed of virtues which we never suspected in ourselves? 'Whosoever shall humble himself as a little child, the same shall be greatest in the kingdom of Heaven.'

Seeing then we know that there is such a day approaching, what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness. Surely it ought above all things to encourage us in that virtue without which no other can exist, that great virtue of sincerity! What man can quietly allow himself in falsehood or equivocation, who knows that his idle words are now recorded, and will be remembered to his confusion; that his false promises will be proclaimed before the as-

sembled universe, and all the treachery of his social intercourse laid bare. What a motive is it to the utmost simplicity and ingenuousness of character, that God is not for a moment deceived by that equivocation, which marks the conduct of many men who have their points to gain, but who are not otherwise absolutely corrupt.

Again. The thought of a judgment to come ought to be a restraint upon every excess of sensuality, every tendency to profligacy. Look up, O sinner, in the heat of thy passion, when the sound of mirth has lulled, and the tide of pleasure begun to ebb, for thou hast known such moments, look up, and see the writing on the wall, 'This night thy soul shall be required of thee; and then whose shall these things be?' And where shalt thou be? Wilt thou go and present thyself in the robes of thy guilt before the tribunal of thy God?

Let the thought of this scene of final trial lessen our pride and vanity; for, at that bar, men will appear as they are, and not as we have thought them to be. What then? Will the petty distinctions of which we are so ambitious, the beauty, the fine form, the grace of action, the wealth, the splendour, the whole apparatus of human vanity disappear, and leave not a fragment for our complacent regard to fix upon in that great day? What is it then, my hearers, that so many of us are contending for, praying, sinning, living, and dying for? 'The fashion of this world passeth away.'

The thought of this day, when the secret sorrows of so many hearts will be revealed, should guard us against all uncharitableness; for with what judgment we judge shall we be judged, and with what measure we mete shall it be measured to us again. Where is the man who would not shrink to have his own heart laid bare, before the very meanest creature whom he has regarded uncharitably? My friends, in that day we shall indeed stand in need of favour; we shall not disdain the complacent regard of the most humble of our fellow creatures.

If these considerations teach us charity, how much more should they teach us forgiveness! Have we ever thought how much we have to be forgiven; and can we, with a debt of a thousand talents unpaid, oppress a poor creature who has besought us to have patience with him till he could discharge his hundred pence?

Lastly. The belief of this judgment to come should not only fortify our minds against unjust accusations, and unexpected misfortunes, but it should also inspire us with the utmost submission and contentment under the changing and unequal circumstances of the present life. Especially let those take comfort whose fond hopes in others have been blasted. This maze of events, so dark and unaccountable to human apprehension, will then be cleared up to the eye of faith and piety. Meanwhile, let us not be deceived; God is not mocked; that which every man soweth here he

shall reap hereafter. Though the righteous be prevented by death, yet shall he be at rest, and the sinner though an hundred years old, shall be condemned. Be not governed by present appearances; judge nothing before the time; wait the issue of this scene of probation; for it is appointed unto all men once to die, and, after death, the judgment.

SERMON V.

THE FUTURE STATE OF THE JUST.

1 Corinthians, XIII. 10.

WHEN THAT WHICH IS PERFECT IS COME, THAT WHICH IS IN PART SHALL BE DONE AWAY.

The contemplation of the life to come, is the frequent employment of every Christian whose faith in the gospel is firm and practical. The discipline of Christianity is rendered effectual by presenting to us motives drawn from another life, adapted to overcome the temptations, and to support the trials of the present.

A subject, then, which must naturally present itself so often to the minds of the Christian, ought to be as distinctly and justly comprehended as the information of scripture, and the suggestions of reason will allow. It was no doubt intended by the Author of our salvation, to leave his followers the most satisfactory assurance of a future life; but he has furnished us with no more definite ideas of the nature and mode of that life, than are necessary for the practical influence of the general

truth. Still it is permitted us, to put together the scattered intimations contained in scripture, and compare them with the suggestions of reason and the analogies to which we can have access, and thus to form some faint notions of the future world. Though the remarks, which will now be offered to you, may fall short of the indistinct and exalted conceptions you may have formed of the future state of existence, they will not, I hope, be thought contradictory to the most obvious meaning of the scripture language, which is highly figurative, or to the suggestions of the soundest reason.

It is indeed impossible for us to conceive of a future life, except according to the ideas which we have derived from our present condition, or to express them in any other words than such as convey sensible images. My object in this discourse will be, not so much to give definite conceptions of scenes which we can know only after our departure from these, as to guard against some erroneous imaginations which may render our belief in a future existence less efficacious than it ought to be.

In the first place, then, wherever we may exist hereafter, we shall not cease to be men. Our human nature will not be changed into the angelic, nor shall we constitute a different order of beings. It is true our Lord has said, that they who are worthy to attain that world, neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of light. This change, however, in our condition, results,

as we may well suppose, from our freedom from these material bodies; and the language of our Saviour is rather a precaution against the sensual fancies of those who would transfer to heaven the delights of a terrestrial paradise, than any specific description of the future world. We shall not, however, be transformed into a superior order of spirits, as angels are imagined to be; for if this were to be the case, there would be no propriety in saying that we should be like them.

What then! are not all our imperfections to be removed? Are we to continue to be frail, limited, finite creatures? Must we still be men? I hope there is no presumption in replying, that we must. For is man, the work of God, the image of the supreme intellect, so poor and worthless a creature that his nature is not worthy of being continued? Let us learn to think more worthily of our destination. If man has been granted so exalted a place in the infinite works of the Creator, he is no doubt worthy of being continued in that exalted station. We find nothing in what we are allowed to observe in the works of God, which indicates that any chasm is to be left in the scale of being, by the transformation of one rank into another. The plan of God appears to be the progressive improvement of the individuals of a species, not the gratification of that vain ambition by which 'men would be angels, angels would be gods.'

Not only may we conclude that our human nature will be preserved, but that every individual

also, will retain his own individual nature, or that which distinguishes him from every other person. Every man has his peculiar capacity, or disposition, which he brought with him into the world, or which he has acquired by diligent cultivation, and we have no reason to imagine that these discriminating properties of his character are to be abolished by the dissolution of his body. In the future world, as in the present, an harmonious whole will no doubt be composed by every one's filling his proper place; by every description of mind finding its proper rank, employment, and happiness; but we have reason to expect a far more perfect state than the present, because composed of better spirits. There, no doubt, as well as here, the degrees of happiness will be as various as the diversities of attainments in knowledge and virtue. It will be enough to secure the perfection of that state, that every one may strive for higher degrees of virtue and happiness without envy; enjoy what is peculiar to himself, and proceed towards the highest points of human perfection, without interruption from the cares, the passions, and the sorrows of this life.

But there will also be an intimate connexion between the future life, and the present. The future will in fact be the continuation of the present. It will be the further evolution of the energies of this; the fruit of what is now sown; the maturity of what is now just appearing; the consummation of what is now imperfect.

It is of the utmost importance that we should keep in view the close and indissoluble connexion of these two stages of our existence. It is this alone which gives any rational efficacy to the grand doctrine drawn from our immortality, that anything done here by us, has a bearing upon futurity. It would be of no moral consequence to tell mankind, that they would be hereafter newly created, to enter another course of being, which had no reference to the present, and was in no degree dependent on it. No! the solemnity, the unspeakable efficacy of the doctrine of a future life, results from this; that the two existences are so intimately and inseparably joined, that the one determines the other. Death is but the lifting up of the curtain which divides them, and the most trifling action or neglect has the same influence upon the character and condition of man after death, that it has in this life.

How truly interesting is this thought! If no man can enter hereafter on any joys for which he has no taste, or employments for which he is not here qualified; if the change, in fact, into another life, furnishes us with nothing which we do not carry out of this, gives us no merits which we do not now possess, and supplies none of our wilful neglects or losses, but God strictly renders to every man according to his deeds, can I utter a truth more alarming to the slothful, the insensible, or the hardened sinner? And this it is, my friends, which gives such dignity and sublimity to the vir-

tue of a Christian, that he is thinking and acting for eternity; not for a posthumous applause in the mouths of a perishable race of mortal men, but for the eternal existence, on which he will personally enter, and for the approbation of that Being, who is from everlasting to everlasting.

What has now been said of the intimate connexion of these two states of existence, and the fact that it will be the same unaltered nature which is to exist here and hereafter, is illustrated and confirmed by the christian doctrine of a resurrection. The language of scripture leads us to expect that a spiritual body will succeed to the present animal structure. This surely would not be provided, if it were not absolutely essential to the nature and continued personality of man, that he should have some kind of organization. If so, then we may suppose that hereafter we shall continue to receive ideas, to exercise memory, and to perform other mental acts, by some organs to supply the place of the present, however more they may be refined, or more exquisitely developed than the present.

I should not venture to introduce such remarks as these, so evidently beyond a living man's observation, if we were not in some measure countenanced by the language of St Paul in that remarkable chapter of Corinthians, where the apostle has so repeatedly spoken of the spiritual body which is to succeed this corruptible frame, and even illustrated it by a comparison which is full of

significancy. 'But some will say, how can the dead rise, and with what body will they come? Knowest thou not, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die? What is it that dies? Is it not the covering of the grain, while the germ subsists, unfolds, and fructifies?'

Again; we have every reason to believe that the next life will be, like the present, progressive; and not only so, but that the degree of knowledge and virtue which we have here attained, will be the point from which we begin our progress hereafter, and determine the place we shall there occupy. The successive moments of our terrestrial existence have been indissolubly connected one with the other. Everything in the works of God proceeds by regular progress and gradation. Death breaks not the chain, but is only the link, connecting the present and the future life. The degree of virtue acquired here, then, by any individual, will determine the degree of happiness or glory to be enjoyed hereafter. The language of revelation expressly establishes this opinion of the diversities and degrees of future happiness and glory. 'To whom much is given, of him much will be required; and to him who hath here, will be given hereafter.' 'God will reward every man according to his works.' Hear the language of the Apostle. 'There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also will it be at the resurection of the dead.'

And not only will the happiness of the future world be enjoyed in innumerable stages and degrees, but the progress from this point will be perpetual, and infinite. One degree of excellence leads of itself to another; and as the distance between created beings, and the uncreated God, between finite and infinite, is essentially and necessarily infinite, so may we be continually tending towards supreme perfection without ever reaching it. Is not this more rational, than that the perfection of which we are ultimately capable should burst upon us at once? We are led to the most unpleasant foreboding, from the appearance of premature capacity on earth; we look upon it as something which violates the order and beauty of God's arrangement; and shall we imagine that heaven will be less harmonious than earth, or that the orderly progress towards perfection will be disturbed by the intervention of death?

Many pious and philosophical minds have indulged themselves in imagining the progress of the renovated man through the future stages of existence. With the whole universe before them, they have followed the emancipated spirit in boundless excursions from planet to planet, sun to sun, and system to system, through the immensity of space. These contemplations are not to be hastily condemned. They serve to raise the soul above the petty and contracting cares of the present life, and to make us feel more of the sublimity and grandeur of the expectations which Chris-

tianity awakens. The future state of the just, we have every reason to believe, will be a state of great activity, and constant advancement in knowledge. But let us not confine our notions of our progress in another life, to the mere enlargement of our knowledge. We may hope that we shall there find goodness more in honor than knowledge, or rather, that the one will be made inseparable from the other. If we may venture to speak of those pursuits, which will be most interesting hereafter to virtuous and pious minds, they will not be the natural history of other worlds, or the astronomy of other systems, so much as the knowledge which will be communicated to us of the history of God's providence; the reasons of many of those events which have now perplexed our philosophy, and eluded our search; the light which will be thrown upon God's moral government of the world. How interesting, too, will be the mere knowledge of ourselves, of our past progress, of the causes which have interrupted, the trials, the privations, and the calamities, which have contributed so mysteriously to the formation of our present character. The study of man, indeed, in connexion with God, will be enough for a long life hereafter, and the knowledge of himself the most fruitful of interest to every individual. 'Now we see through a glass darkly.' This world and our own characters are full of enigmas. 'Then we shall know even as we are known,' and it will be no small accession of knowledge to know ourselves, even as we are known by others.

As every consideration leads us to believe that the future life will be a social state, therefore love, kind affections, and good will, are to constitute the real reward, the true felicity of heaven. We say that the future state will be a social state. Are we not authorized to say this, by that language of scripture, which speaks of the assemblies of just men made perfect, and of the many mansions which Jesus has prepared for his followers, that where he is they may be also? Besides, if our future happiness, as we before observed, is to be the happiness of men, we know of none, except that which depends on the mere gratification of the senses, which may not be communicated to others, and which is not increased by this participation. We are to enter also a state of retribution, and it is difficult to imagine how that retribution can be accomplished, if all the relations with those among whom we have lived, giving and receiving good or evil, are to be at once abolished. It is true, that the social character of the future state, does not necessarily suppose that former intimacies will be renewed. But if there is to be a junction of virtuous persons, it seems hardly consistent with all the analogies of nature, that those should be unknown to each other, who seem best formed for the promotion of each other's happiness; or that, where two minds have been subject to the same discipline, formed the same habits, and drawn their happiness from the same sources, they should, in another state, be cut off

from an enjoyment so pure, merely in consequence of their transition to another region.

I know that in consequence of the prodigious change effected by the dissolution of these bodies, it may be seriously doubted whether we shall have the same visible marks of mutual recognition, which now make us known to each other. But there are beings, we may hope, who could not fail of finding each other again, by those eternal and ineffaceable characters of mind and sympathies of soul, which bound them together here, more strongly than all the ties of consanguinity, or the strength of long intimacy.

Here, then, enters the delightful thought of love purified, enlarged, and invigorated. Here we have a glimpse of self-annihilation, and of that infinite benevolence which now exists only in God. It seems indeed that here on earth we feel very little love, which is not in some measure supported by the relation of the object to ourselves as individuals. We see and feel ourselves in all that is about us. Very wonderful will be the change, then, if we can know in all its purity and power that affection which is satisfied with the sole pleasure of making others happy. We may even then know what it is to love God himself, not as we love him here, so feebly, so faintly, so inadequately, but supremely and unalterably, without fear, or doubt, or error.

But it is impossible for us to penetrate to the extent of moral perfection which may be attained, when the senses shall no longer degrade our af-

fections, nor the imagination corrupt our hearts; when the consciousness of the divine approbation, unmingled and undisturbed, shall fill our souls, and nothing be wanting to ensure our endless happiness, but the pure and holy perception of the happiness of others.

All these considerations which confirm our expectations of a state of social existence, lead us to regard the future as an active life. Far be it from me to diminish the comfortable hope of that rest which remaineth to the people of God; or to deprive the patient, careworn, and exhausted Christian of the tranquillizing prospect of repose in the presence of his God. But rest is not torpor, nor repose inactivity. Nothing in nature, or in scripture, authorized the notion which too commonly prevails, that the good will be in a state of pure rest, or passive enjoyment, absorbed in the contemplation of God, and yielding to impressions of pleasure independent of all activity of body or mind. This cannot be the heaven which God, the eternally active, powerful, and vivifying spirit, has provided for creatures made in his image, and whose perfection consists in the active imitation of his benevolence. Let the thought that we are to be continually employed, and employed in the diffusion of that good at which God aims, enter into our anticipations of futurity. All there will be exercise; exercise of our faculties in the acquisition of knowledge, of our affections in the love of God's creatures, of our powers in the communication of his benefits. We are here most hap-

py when most employed, and can opportunities or objects, or means, or inclination be hereafter wanting in the immense range of God's creation?

Who then is the man that is fit for heaven? The selfish, solitary, and indolent speculatist; the griping, hoarding, narrow-minded child of earth; the vain, proud, self-important man of consequence? No! the heaven which we describe can be no place for them. The proper candidates for heaven, are the men who diligently fulfil the duties of their station; who live most for others, and with unremitted and unwearied care, exert their talents in laboring to correct their own dispositions, and to promote the good of others.

There is another circumstance in the future life of the Christian, which it would be inexcusable to omit, and that is, the presence of Christ. He has gone to prepare a place for his followers, that where he is they may be also. It is on these promises that the Christian's hope has been supported. 'Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me.' What though all his other expectations of the specific nature or employments of his future condition should be false, yet it is enough for the Christian to know, that hereafter Christ will be his companion, and his friend. Beloved, now are we the sons of God; if children, then heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

Who then are to be partakers of this life to come? The world is full of rational beings, capable of forming the conception and cherishing the hope of such an existence. But can we expect to find hereafter, in a more exalted state, all the degraded creatures who live now on the mercy and forbearance of God? Neither scripture nor reason will allow this hope. There are those who will sleep in the dust of the earth, and awake to everlasting contempt. The society of heaven cannot be composed, like the present, of the foolish and the wise, the virtuous and the profligate, the worthless and the excellent. Into the world we have been describing entereth nothing that defileth or that maketh a lie. 'And I heard a voice out of heaven saying, It is done. I am alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. He that overcometh, shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the second death.'

How glorious are the prospects opened to the eye of faith and virtue! Separated from the wicked, to dwell only with the wise and virtuous, to act with them, to learn with them, and to worship with them the everlasting Father; to be occupied forever in the general good of God's creatures, and to proceed from good to better, from glory to glory.

SERMON VI.

SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

JOHN, XVIII. 36.

JESUS ANSWERED; MY KINGDOM IS NOT OF THIS WORLD.

WHEN our Saviour was brought before Pilate, and maliciously charged by the Jews with affecting regal power, Pilate asks, 'Art thou the King of the Jews,' and receives the reply in the text.

In the opinion of the Roman judge it appears to have been explicit and satisfactory; for he went out without delay to our Saviour's accusers, to protest a second time that he found no fault in him. This reply, which, at the time, seems to have produced in the mind of Pilate a conviction of the innocence of our Saviour's designs, and of the intellectual nature of that influence and authority which he had endeavoured to establish, stands yet on record, to refute those idle accusations of disingenuous men, by which they have represented the religion of Jesus as a contrivance of ambitious imposters, and the spiritual engine of

political power. It stands yet on record, to reproach the weakness of Pilate, who, after such a declaration, could yield up the Son of God as a dangerous and seditious enemy of Cæsar, and also as a reproach to the pride and spiritual despotism of many sectaries and princes in the history of the church. It stands yet on record, to encourage and console the real church of Christ in times of affliction, persecution, apostasy, and decay; for, whether our religion enjoy the favor, or endure the hostility of the civil powers; whether the kingdoms which call themselves christian are swept away, or extended; whether this globe itself endure or vanish from the systems of the world, the Prince of Peace is not dethroned, nor his holy dominion destroyed, nor his realm invaded, nor the peace and privileges of his subjects disturbed.

Every religion, which the world, before the coming of Christ, had known, was more or less incorporated with established governments. The system of Paganism was altogether civil; the augurs could suspend any proceeding of state, and at last, the character of priest was invariably united with that of emperor. The religion of Moses, too, was intimately incorporated with his civil polity, and however the circumcision of the heart only might be recommended by a christian apostle, no one could ever belong to the Jewish nation, who did not first, by this outward rite of religious initiation, belong to the Jewish church.

But, the religion of Jesus, thanks be to God! was linked with the fortunes of no nation, and wrought into the forms of no government. It interferes with none of the distinctions of political society. It is a religion circumscribed by no natural boundaries, suited to every climate, country, and state of improvement, and adapted to all the ages of the world. It has no peculiar exemptions, nor peculiar privileges for any sex, age, or order of society. In one word, it was designed to be universal and immortal. It has its rudiments only in this world, but its perfection hereafter. The subjects of Christ's kingdom here, are a small and distant colony of a mighty empire, placed where their loyalty is in a state of perpetual probation, to be transplanted successively to the parent country, and to dwell under the more immediate influence of the Prince of Peace, in heaven, the seat of his immediate presence.

Jesus, in his reply to Pilate, who had asked him whether he were a king, adds, in confirmation of the unwarlike nature of the kingdom which he came to establish, 'If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have fought, they would not have permitted me to be delivered up to the Jews.' Our Saviour does not offer this as the only, nor the strongest proof of the spiritual nature of his government, but as one which was evidently suggested by his actual circumstances.

Our Saviour's meaning in the words of our text undoubtedly was, that he was indeed a king, but

that the sway he should exercise, would be marked by none of the insignia of temporal power, that it would consist in the spiritual influence of his gospel, and the acknowledgment of his authority in the hearts of all his faithful followers, through a long succession of ages; that this world was not the limit of his reign, but that his kingdom would be continued and consummated hereafter.

It shall be our present object to show you how little the kingdom of Christ resembles, and how little it is connected with the kingdoms of the world, in its origin, its establishment, its nature, and its duration.

I. First, then, in its origin. We discern in reality what was so often absurdly claimed by the founders of states, we discern a celestial origin. With what retired and peaceful auguries is it ushered in! In that day when the Lord of hosts began to set up a kingdom which should never be destroyed, the world, we are told, was reposing in universal peace. This spiritual kingdom is introduced, and the states and empires of the earth are undisturbed. In an humble village of Judea, an inconsiderable province of the empire, angels, in the stillness of the midnight air, announce to shepherds the birth of the Prince of Peace, by the song of peace and good will to men. At the age of thirty years, this Son of God enters publicly, but quietly, and without ostentation, on the business of his mission. At first he is employed in teaching humility to a few ambitious disciples; he

is employed in establishing the influence of the most unaspiring religion in hearts the most adverse to its reception; and thus, my friends, is God's minister employed upon earth, during a laborious life. We observe in Jesus no solicitude to swell the number of his adherents by flattering promises, and no care to retain those, who, from admiration or curiosity, called themselves his disciples. A ruler comes and falls down before him, professing himself his follower. Our Saviour, instead of eagerly embracing him as a valuable acquisition to his cause, proposes a severe test of his sincerity. 'Sell all that thou hast, and give it to the poor, and then come and follow me.' The disappointed ruler departs in sorrow, for, says the evangelist, he had great possessions. These, however, to a teacher of worldly views, would have been his highest recommendation.

II. Let us in the second place endeavour to trace the establishment of this kingdom in the world after the death of its founder. You will naturally ask what provision is made for its continuance and extension? Without doubt the world would previously suppose that Jesus, like Mahomet, had appointed his successors, given them minute political instructions, and assigned to them their different departments. Perhaps he had directed them to retire, as they did from Jerusalem, to avoid the gathering storm, to collect in silence their scattered adherents, to wait in secret the increase of their numbers, and their strength,

and to return in due time to avenge the murder of their master, and to plant the cross on the ruins of the temple. Not a word of all this. Their Lord is crucified, and the disciples are dispersed. The interests of this desperate cause are left, my friends, to the efforts of the men who had fled in panic from Jerusalem. They are left to the untutored eloquence of Peter, that timid disciple who had denied his Master; to the persuasive and affectionate simplicity of the young John; to the fortitude, the zeal, the learning of Paul, who was now perhaps sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, smiling at the unsuccessful ministry of Jesus. And yet these are the means by which the kingdom that is not of this world is to be extended. These are the peaceful arms which are to beat down the strong holds of vice, and spread the triumphs of the cross, and vanquish the lusts and passions and prejudices of an enlightened age.

Observe the circumstances which attended the progress of this kingdom, and you will see that it neither interfered, nor was connected with the kingdoms of the world. It threatens not the established power of a single subordinate officer, throughout the Roman empire. It proposes no change in men's civil relations. It may coexist with any form of government, and any station of society. The kingdom of heaven is capacious enough to include the slave chained to his task, and the emperor seated on his throne. It requires not the former to break his fetters, nor the

latter to cast away his crown. While it was winning its way through the wide extent of the Roman empire, though the workmen who made silver shrines for Diana might have had some cause for their clamor, Cæsar himself had no reason to be alarmed, and no excuse to persecute. Into this kingdom enters Onesimus the servant of Philemon, and into this kingdom how gladly would have been received the king Agrippa, almost persuaded to be a Christian! Upon this subject of the interference of Christianity with men's civil relations, we need only quote the words of the apostle. 'Is any man called being circumcised, let him not become uncircumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, slavery is nothing, and freedom is nothing, but the keeping the commandments of God.'

Further; as the kingdom of Christ, in its establishment, gave no offence to the reigning powers, so it received support from none, while it gave support to all. While it was making men fit to leave the world, it fitted them also to live peaceably in it, and a good subject of Christ was also a good subject of any government on earth. It asked only for tolerance, and it gave peace in return. Yet it encountered the most cruel opposition. Even the benevolent and enlightened Trajan could persecute and burn a Christian without remorse. And what think you, my friends, would have been the fate of a temporal power, attempting to establish itself at such a moment in the cen-

tre of the Roman empire? Nay, what think you would have been the fate of Christianity itself, if it had then consisted, like the religion of many of its professors at the present day, in its public institutions, in the number of its churches, in the reception of the sacrament, in the baptism of children, in the hearing of sermons, and in the peace and splendor and quiet of a church? Thank God, there were subjects of Jesus then existing, to whom the honor and love of their Master were dearer than life. Thank God, there were hearts beating with the influence of the gospel, though its rites were secret, and its assemblies small and despised. Hence, when the temples of Christ were burning, the sanctuary in the heart was untouched; when his professors were led to the stake, his subjects were multiplied, and Christianity flourished, though its rites were suppressed, and trodden under the foot of power.

But, my friends, this picture of poverty and persecution is soon to be reversed. This kingdom, which was not of the world, is soon to be united in its forms to the kingdoms of the civil world. Its professors rise to dignities in the empire; the emperor himself adopts it to strengthen his throne; the ministers of the gospel aspire to worldly dominion, and endeavour thus to extend, by the same victory, the borders of the empire and the limits of the church. All is security and wealth, and pomp and power without. The empire is christianized, but yet Christ has hardly gained a

subject. Amid all this splendor, the meek spirit of the gospel is lost and overwhelmed; and after this professed union of the religion of Jesus with the establishments of the world, corruptions, divisions, superstition, and ecclesiastical dominion, more to be dreaded than the hordes of northern barbarians which overswept the empire, desolated the church; and they have transmitted their deadly influence to these remote ages. Truly, if this work had not been originally of God, it would long since have been destroyed by the very encouragement its profession has received.

We have thus seen that our Lord's kingdom was not of the world in its origin; that it sought no aid from the world in its establishment; that it interfered not with the kingdoms of the world in its extension, and that it receives no real support from a union with the powers of the world, in its interests.

III. Consider, in the third place, the subjects of this kingdom, and its spiritual nature will more clearly appear. Do not look for them, my friends, in that long roll of christian emperors, beginning with the reign of Constantine. You may traverse the galleries of the imperial palace, and pass through the retinue of courtiers, and I fear you will hardly meet a disciple of the humble Nazarene. Do not look for them in the pompous martyrology of persecuting saints, who swell the calendar of the Romish church. I am compelled to say, too, that you must not look for them among

those dignitaries who have lorded it over God's heritage, or among those barefooted and bare-headed imposters, who have concealed a vain and aspiring temper under the cloak of pretended mortification. I do not deny that a humble and holy spirit may reside under the purple and the ermine, while a proud heart may beat under haircloth and rags; yet, to find the subjects of Jesus, we must often descend to mean abodes, and often penetrate the recesses of domestic life, where we most often find the humble, the pure, the just and pious, of whom the world has too often been unworthy.

These are they who have passed through great tribulation; men who have attained an enviable superiority to the pleasures, the pains, the honors, the riches, and the poverty which surround them. No man can claim the privilege of this government, who has not subdued his passions to the authority of Christ. He seeks no doubtful characters, who wish to be indulged in a partial attachment, who are ready to give up one vice if they may be allowed to retain another, but who revolt at the first bribe which the world offers. Especially does Christ disclaim those subjects who have taken his name because his religion is popular, and they hope to reap the advantages which may be connected with a profession of his doctrines. The rewards of his kingdom are intellectual and heavenly. They are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world. The records

of Christianity are humble, and this is an inconceivable consolation to the follower of Jesus, when he mourns over the degeneracy of some and the insensibility of others, that millions will appear in the rolls of future renown, whose names have never been seen in the page of history, and never reached the ear of any but the Almighty Judge of the secrets of the heart of man.

It is time to close with a few reflections. If such then be the spiritual nature of the kingdom of Christ, we infer,

First, that this kingdom will remain when all the states and empires of the world shall have passed down the stream of time, far out of the reach of human recollection. How has the map of the world been changed since the introduction of the religion of Jesus! There is not one of its old divisions to be traced. Where now is that cruel Jewish Sanhedrim which crucified the Lord of Life? Where is that proud Hebrew commonwealth, which saw with such malice the rising kingdom, and strove in vain to crush the infant church? Nay, where now is that famous Roman empire, composed of so many mighty nations, in the midst of which Christianity sprung up, like a tender shoot in a forest of lofty and aged trees, which have since decayed and fallen around it, and left it tall, spreading, and vigorous? Where now is that long train of persecuting emperors, who wasted their resources in exterminating the humble subjects of this kingdom? And not only so,

where now are the empires, with which it was incorporated, and which lent it their support? They have fallen. But Christianity has not fallen. Fear not, then, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you a kingdom, which cannot be destroyed.

Again; we may infer from this subject what the religion of Christ truly consists in. You who understand by it the assumption of a peculiar name, tell us, where was Christianity before its followers were called Christians first in Antioch? Is it the entrance upon a peculiar profession? Where was it when it was not permitted to show itself in public? Does it consist in the reception of the elements or in baptism? There have been periods when these rites have been impracticable. Perhaps you imagine it to consist in the establishment of churches, of public worship, or of an order of ministers. Alas! it is too certain that you may have been born and have lived in Christendom; you may have been baptized in infancy, in manhood, or in both; you may have communicated with the purest church on earth; you may have worn the threshold of the sanctuary with your footsteps; you may have borne the vessels of the altar, and entered the desk of instruction, without having entered the kingdom of Christ. Think you the possession of the privileges of the gospel, is obedience to the gospel? or that the being decorated with the insignia of the empire, will give you admittance to the everlasting kingdom of our

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? No. For when once the master of the house hath risen up and hath shut the door, though many standing without will begin to knock at the door and say, Lord, Lord, open unto us, he will answer, I know you not, whence ye are. Then will they begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he will say, I tell you again, I know you not, whence ye are. Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. For there will come from the east and the west, from the north and from the south, many who will sit at the table in the kingdom of God, and behold these are cast out.

Lastly; we may infer from the spirituality of Christ's kingdom, the proper means of extending it. On this subject the most dreadful mistakes have prevailed in different ages, and among the best of men; mistakes, which, at the present day, fill us with astonishment and shame. Nations have been christianized, as it has been termed, at the point of the sword, and Jesus was supposed to have gained a disciple, when a christian prince only gained another subject. But though, by the grace of God, most of us now understand, that a kingdom which is not of this world is not to be extended by the force of arms, but only by the force of moral motives, and the pacific introduction of religious teaching, yet even our zeal is now imperfectly directed. Our families, my friends, our children, our dependents are our first care.

I cannot estimate very highly the wisdom or the sincerity of that man who promotes missions to the ends of the earth, while those who are immediately under his eye, are ignorant of the first principles of the oracles of God. The first victory which the gospel gains should be over our own hearts. Till this is achieved, it is weak and absurd for us to rejoice in the triumphs of the cross at the extremities of the earth.

My kingdom is not of this world, saith our Saviour. But are we not of this world? And when we are summoned, as we soon must be, to leave it, shall we not feel as if we were quitting in exile, a land where all our pleasures and hopes have centred? God grant that we may so understand the declaration in the text, that heaven may prove our native soil, the abode of our friends, our parent country, and an abundant and welcome entrance be there administered to us, in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

SERMON VII.

MISAPPREHENSIONS AS TO THE NATURE OF RELIGION.

ROMANS, XIV. 17.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT MEAT AND DRINK; BUT RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND PEACE, AND JOY IN THE HOLY GHOST.

IN these words are described, with much truth and conciseness, the nature and the effect of religion. It consists in the practice of righteousness, and it is accompanied with a spirit of peace and joy, resulting from an habitual confidence in God, the author of all moral and religious happiness. The last clause, 'joy in the holy spirit,' admits of various interpretations. It may signify that satisfaction, which the Christians in the apostolic age derived from the possession of the extraordinary gifts of the spirit; or, it may be opposed here to that dissocial disposition, which disturbed the intercourse between Jew and Gentile, on the subject of the use of meats, mentioned in the preceding verse. It is otherwise rendered, 'joy in a holy spirit,' or a pure and benevolent state of the affections. But I am willing to understand by it, that

contented and joyful state of mind, which belongs to a man of real devotion, who possesses confidence towards God, and that filial spirit which makes duty easy, afflictions light, death harmless, futurity promising, and the whole course of the christian life cheerful, active, and full of expectation.

The kingdom of God is not meat and drink. It does not consist, as those imagined to whom the apostle wrote, in abstaining from the use of certain kinds of food, nor in the liberty of using them. This is only one instance, which stands, however, as a specimen of the mistakes, that prevail with regard to the general nature of religion; mistakes, which are entirely consistent with the most scrupulous conscience, with the most animated zeal, with any form of worship, or any profession of doctrine.

I. The misapprehension of the nature of religion itself, will form the subject of the first division of this discourse.

Let it be premised, however, that this is a question entirely different from the inquiry, what are the true doctrines of Christianity, or what is fundamental in the belief of every man, who assumes the name of Christian. It is true that false notions of the nature of religion may be grounded on the supposition, or supported by the persuasion of the truth or importance of particular tenets; but, however closely mistakes in practice, or imperfections of temper may be connected with false

articles of belief, error in our notions of particular doctrines, is entirely distinct from our misconception of the nature and design of religion itself. This is primary and antecedent, and must be corrected, not merely by correcting particular tenets, but by more comprehensive views of religion in general.

The most exact conceptions may be formed, and the most perfect delineations may be made of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, without conveying to a mind which will not reflect, the peculiar characteristics of a religious spirit. Just notions of what religion is, must be collected rather from the general spirit of the gospel history, and a study of the character of God, and of man in his relation to his Maker, than from any precise definitions of particular truths. Yet, notwithstanding all the variety of opinions existing in the christian world, resulting from the ignorance or the passions of man, it is a most consoling thought, that the doctrines which Christians acknowledge in common, are a sufficient foundation for real religion, and will effect, with the blessing of God's grace, the sanctification and happiness of every man, who is previously furnished with just notions of the nature of this most precious gift.

1. Among the mistakes of the nature of religion, is one, by which, that is taken for religion which may perhaps with greater propriety be termed a complete absence, in the character, of everything essential to religion. This mistake discovers

itself in that way of talking, which makes religion consist in good dispositions to virtue, in amiable instincts, in a certain decorum and inoffensiveness of conduct, which no violent passions interrupt. Of this character are most of those Christians, who pass in the world unnoted for offences against the supposed laws of God and men. It is true, such persons are rather denominated good, than religious men, because it is too often notorious to the observer, that the idea of God has hardly entered their minds, and exerts no influence whatever on their amiable dispositions. Such men may be said to act from anything, rather than from a principle of religion. They are so happy as to possess dispositions favorable to virtue, and a certain inoffensiveness of character, which is agreeable to the selfish indolence of mankind. But though a principle of conscience may never have governed, nor any intelligent spirit of benevolence have animated their conduct, though they have lived without God in the world, and have really been free from vice only in consequence of the favor of circumstances, they are falsely set down as examples of what Christianity is designed to form. Of religion, if of nothing else, it may be said, that it is utterly unknown, where there does not exist an habitual reference to God, where the affections towards God have never been called into exercise, or where there is not a principle of progressive obedience, continually aiming at improvement and panting for perfection. It is

true that the term religious is not often vouchsafed to such men as have been described; but they are familiarly termed innocent, virtuous, unblamable. I need not say that those who have formed no higher conceptions of religion than these, have yet to acquire the very rudiments of christian excellence. They have not stepped upon the threshold of the gospel; they have not even inquired for the avenues to the sanctuary. To them it is nothing whether anything is known of God or not, or anything of a future destination; much less do they know whether Christ has lived, or died, or risen, or left anything of importance to the knowlege or well-being of mankind. These men live for no purpose, which does not terminate in some temporal advantage, or at least, to which death may not put an effectual close.

2. Directly opposite to this negative notion of a religious character, is the mistake of those who make it to consist entirely in services performed expressly towards God, as if he had an interest distinct from that of his creatures, or required our homage, either of conduct or affection, as if it were some advantage to himself. It is true that the term religion, is originally and properly applicable to the duties towards God, in distinction from those of social life; but to imagine that these services are valuable in any other respect, than as they tend to promote some further purpose, or to imagine that God is not served, except by acts that are expressly directed to him, is to confound

altogether the notions of religion with the demands of a superior. There is nothing in the religion of Christ which demands religious services from men, purely for their value in themselves, but to answer some higher end, either of their improvement or comfort. The gospel does not teach us to confine our consciences to these religious rites, nor does it require us to consider the time which is not spent in acts of this kind, as lost or wasted. It does not exclude the idea of holiness from other actions than those which have God for their object, from other thoughts than those into which the idea of him enters; but it makes all good affections a part of religion, all acts of kindness, and indeed, the whole circle of our employments and pleasures, when they are wisely directed and gratefully enjoyed, a worship of himself. Neither does the gospel encourage us to judge of our progress in virtue by the number of our merely religious acts; but it estimates the worth of our character in all our relations, and especially regards the whole bias of the affections towards goodness. Such is the language of Jehovah himself. 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord.' Isaiah i. 11. In this I am by no means for discouraging the most diligent use of instrumental duties; nor would I in any degree diminish the value of services, which we owe directly to God; for these require in every way to be encouraged or awakened. But it is to dispel the illusion, which prevails in some minds, that

the value of a man's religion is to be estimated by the turn of his mind towards acts of worship, or by the time which is employed in them; and to impress upon you the conviction that our duties towards God are of no value, unless the effect of them is perceived in our affections in general, and in the whole conduct of life.

3. Another mistake of the nature of religion is that which makes it only a source of comfort; a cordial to be opened only when the spirit faints. It would make Christianity a pure dispensation of mercy, provided only to pacify the terrors of conscience, or administer comfort to the sick and dying. Hence the long delay in attending to a subject, which is expected to present itself at last in the guise of an angel of mercy, to bear away the departing spirit in the arms of love. By those who take this view, the minister of religion is considered only in the light of a messenger of consolation to the distressed spirit. He is expected to appear at the couch of the dying, though he may never have been seen before, provided with every balm for the terrified conscience, and with tears of sympathy and words of love for the bereaved. Religion is thought something which may be grasped, when we are compelled to let go our hold of life and of everything else which we have valued; a last resort, a provision for a moment of destitution or despondency; in short, a dispensation of unmingled as well as unmerited grace. To correct this most dangerous misapprehension, it is suf-

ficient, perhaps, only to have stated it; and I trust you will never indulge the idea that you may, in the last extremity, adopt that as a medicine, which you have never used as a daily nutriment, or that it is provided as an opiate for your last agonies, instead of being the food of the soul, on which it must have been nourished to everlasting life.

4. Perhaps I have already anticipated the misconceptions of those, who seem to regard religion as a business separate from the usual occupations of life; who imagine that, in order to practise it with propriety, peculiar circumstances are necessary, and that peculiar situations must present themselves. Thus, one man is said to have time for religion, another is said to have been brought up to it; and it is thought that something like disgust towards the usual condition of life, must be excited, before religion can be attended to with any earnestness or pleasure.

That man has unquestionably a mistaken notion of religion who supposes it to be impracticable in any lawful condition of life. It must first be the rule, before it can be the business; and when it is sufficiently understood, it will only regulate, and by no means banish our customary occupations. It may be superadded to, or associated with all the varieties of an innocent and useful life, limiting, controlling, inspiring, and purifying the whole course of the thoughts, the conversation, and the actions. It is this false notion of the separate existence, if I may so express it, of the religious

character, that has generated the swarms of unprofitable ecclesiastics, mystics, monks, devotees, and fanatics in Christendom. It is this mistake, which leads the sensual and worldly to say to their faithful monitors, in their moments of compunction, 'I look forward to the time when I shall have more leisure to attend to the subject. I wish to escape from the pressure of my cares, that I may think of God, but at present I find no disposition to attend to the subject.'

When I say that religion is not a separate employment, it is also true, that the Christian walks by faith and not by sight; but he is travelling the same road with his neighbours, he must adopt the same conveniences, and share in the common accommodations of the way. The difference between the religious man and others, is, that he keeps always in view the end of his journey. By this, he regulates his time, his repose, his pleasures, his movements, and all the changes of his course. The irreligious man, on the contrary, imagines himself sent into the world on a mere excursion of pleasure. He stops by the way side, he riots where he stops, he is impoverished, he is ruined.

5. Another false notion of religion is that, which makes it to consist in certain unexplained impulses of the mind, or sensations of pleasure in particular views of Christianity, which cannot be made intelligible to those who have not experienced these sensations.

This propensity to make religion a spirit which is infused into the mind, rather than a healthy state of all the affections and the perfection of that nature which we receive originally from God, is extremely flattering to the vanity of man. It establishes at once, a kind of distinction, understood however only by those who boast of this rare faculty. It makes grace a privilege to distinguish the possessor, rather than a talent, which all men may obtain and improve. It removes all the tests of real goodness out of the observation of the world, and places the standard in the feelings of the person, where it is accessible only by him who has the testimony of the spirit within himself. It seems to imply that, for the purpose of attaining truth, on the subject of religion, a new faculty must be created in the mind, the operations of which are not to be regulated by the common laws of belief, or explained in analogy with the common nature of man.

By these remarks, I am very far from asserting that the feelings, sympathies, hopes, and fears of a man truly religious, are not very different from those of men who have never made it a subject of serious reflection, or who have never resolved to guide their conduct by its laws. But I mean only to assert, that there is nothing extraordinary in a religious habit of the mind; nothing which may not be explained by the common laws of the human character, by the operation of religious motives, and the influence of hope, fear, and love,

when enlightened with a knowledge of our duty, and grounded on the simple truths of the gospel. Religion must either be recommended by arguments, which cannot be confuted, or by good effects, which cannot be denied. If no further account is to be given of it, than that it is a special favor vouchsafed to individuals, and that no words can describe its operation, all I can say is, that it must be left to those who possess it, while we endeavour to make the best use we can of our common interpretation of the gospel of Christ.

From what has been said on the subject of sensation in religion, I beg that it may not be understood that I am insensible of the importance of the affections. I know that without them, we shall never find the ways of religion ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace. I would only contend against that vanity, or that fanaticism, which would make the peculiarities of one man's feelings, the test of another's sincerity, or which spends itself in exertions to excite a frame of mind, which produces little other good to ourselves or others, than merely to exhilarate while it lasts.

I have not dwelt so long upon this species of misapprehension of the nature of religion, because I think it the error into which you, my hearers, are most likely to fall; but only to guard you against the progress of an evil, which, though small and secret in its kindlings, may easily rise into a conflagration which will burn till it strips society of its comfort and its ornament.

And now, my friends, to close this most important division of my discourse, I cannot forbear saying, that no mistake of the nature of Christianity, which is at the same time accompanied with a supreme fear of offending God, or with an unaffected love of the well-being of others, is half so much to be dreaded and to be lamented, as that profound supineness and indifference to religion, which sometimes assumes the name and the honors of liberality. Any existing form of superstition, any of the common stages of fanaticism, is to be preferred to that dead, sensual, worldly heart, which has never feared, never thought, and never resolved upon the service of God. Rather let us suffer all the terrors of superstition, and hear the voice of an angry God in every blast that rushes by us, or fear his frowns in every solitude, than live on without God in the world, without thought of eternity, in luxury, in selfishness, in secret sins, with the false and fearful misapprehension, that religion will come at last and offer us mercy in our departing hour. Far better would it be to spend our lives in the most childish acts of superstition, to count our beads and macerate our bodies, than that our hearts should be destitute of the love of God, or that we should imagine a religion may be tolerated by the God of love, in which our affections have no share.

II. I come now to the second part of my discourse, in which I shall attempt to give you some notion of the characteristic spirit of Christianity.

The spirit of Christianity is that which is peculiar and essential to it, and which may exist where its forms are impracticable, and where the terms of belief are not defined. It is that which constitutes a man a Christian always, and everywhere; in his church or in his family, in his prayers or his pleasures, in the fulness of his strength or in the last fainting exercises of his expiring life.

1. The spirit of our religion is, first, then, a spirit of faith. This always has been, and always must be the earliest principle of a religious character. For it approximates what is remote, it illustrates what is obscure, makes us see what is invisible, feel what is intellectual, realize as present what is actually future, and receive as strictly certain, what is in truth only highly probable. As the apostle says, it is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things unseen and future. The spirit of faith is also a spirit of confidence in God, like that of a child in the paternal character of a father, or like that of a pupil in the superior wisdom and information of a master. The Christian feels the highest trust in the wisdom of God, and a tranquillizing persuasion of the benevolence of his designs. He anticipates, with as strong a confidence, the accomplishment of God's purposes in a future life, as he expects the events of the next week, or of the next morning. Hence all that he enjoys, and all that he suffers, he enjoys or suffers with some remote or immediate reference to his future ex-

istence; in taking a view of his own life, he cannot but include, at every glance, ages beyond the tomb. It is the privilege of faith to furnish light along this length of being. This is not a spirit of credulity, but of trust; nor of presumption, but of tranquil hope; nor of pride, for it is a persuasion accessible to all; nor of dogmatism, but of legitimate and rational conviction. Deprive man of this faith, make it impossible or absurd, and our situation is like that of children without a protector; we wander about, away from our Father in heaven, to lie down at last in death, with the fallen leaves to cover us.

2. The spirit of Christianity is, secondly, a spirit of devotion. God, who compasseth the path of his servants is also in all their thoughts. The idea of God can never present itself to the mind of a real Christian, when he is not prepared to entertain it; therefore it is never unpleasant, never oppressive. He sees God in everything; the ordinary, as well as the extraordinary, the minute, as well as the vast; the painful, the pleasant, the material, the intellectual. To him all other objects are secondary; God is ultimate. Therefore, while God lives, he lives within his influence, and can lose nothing, he can want nothing. He cannot look out upon nature without carrying his thoughts to its Author; and all the happiness which meets his observation, the activity and health of the inferior orders of creatures, even the fruitfulness of the soil, the sunshine, the rain,

the seed time, the harvest, remind him of God, as we see an absent friend in the place where he sat, the books he has read, the lines he has written, or the tokens he has left us of his remembrance.

The world the Christian lives in, is God's; the beings he loves and converses with are God's; the joys he reaps are God's gifts; the disappointments he encounters are God's arrangements; the changes in external nature, in his affections, his pleasures, his pains, are to him perpetual indications of God's superintending care.

A devotional spirit gives also a cast of sublimity to the most ordinary character. It is this spirit which consecrates the habits of a man's mind, and lifts him into such a sphere that angels may hold converse with him. He takes a station among the orders of God's creatures, which earthly and sensual men, however dignified by fame or honor, may look up to with reverence. The peculiar character of christian devotion, unlike all other, is filial. The access to God is free. Every embarrassment is removed from the sincere votary, and his worship must be frank, filial, simple, and reverential.

3. The spirit of Christianity is, thirdly, a spirit of love. I need not here repeat the passages, which assure us that he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God and God in him. If there ever was a scheme which had love for its origin, its tendency, and its consummation, it is that of the gospel. The man who embraces it, shares a benefit with

millions of individuals, it may be of worlds. It is impossible for a man, who is interested in the mediation of the Son of God, ever to feel as if he were alone in the world; for, in his relation to Jesus, he is bound to others by that fine union of sentiment, which cannot be felt in the perishing connexions of time.

Christianity binds us so closely to the happiness of the universe, that the Christian rejoices continually in the prospect of good. He sacrifices, without a sigh, innumerable personal accommodations, to that comprehensive object of benevolence, the recovery of human nature. He must inevitably grow rich himself, as well as enrich others, by every privation to which he submits for the sake of those for whom Jesus died.

He must also find perpetual satisfaction in the exercise of christian love, because there is not a man on earth who has not some claim to his interest. In the prospective benevolence of God, we are all equally dear. And even now, when we find ourselves among innumerable pilgrims, travelling to the same grave, wanting the same consolations, exposed to the same fearful changes, the same heart-rending sorrows, and even the same final loss, and at last brought forth by the same resurrection to stand before the same Judge, with an untried region of life before us; and when we add to this the single word, eternity, even the poor embryo, who scarcely may be called an intellectual being, is to the Christian a precious life.

4. Once more ; the spirit of Christianity is a spirit of joy. Not that the tranquillity of a Christian is not liable to be disturbed by the pains and sufferings of human nature, or that he exhibits the inconsiderate folly of the perpetually riotous and gay. But the state of his affections should be that of humble and devoted tranquillity. To rejoice in the paternal character of a being of whose presence you can never be unconscious, to adore a being of whose protection you can never despair, or whose direction of your lot you can never suppose to be otherwise than merciful and just, is surely all that can be necessary to permanent joy.

It is the spirit of Christianity to rejoice in the present, the past, and the future ; in the present, because our joys and sorrows are not at this moment ultimate, but means to a future end. What we call calamity, or good fortune, in the affairs of states, or of individuals, in the eye of a Christian, are only footsteps of the revolutions of Providence, which are not to be dwelt upon with anxious interest. He rejoices in the past, because he has found in his own experience, that what he dreaded as sufferings, are truly pleasures in retrospection, and what he regarded as disappointments, proved 'blessings in disguise.' He rejoices in the future, because it is God's, and God's only ; and as he approaches the period of his own dissolution, he finds the western hemisphere lighted up with streaks of setting lustre, and he looks forward with

humble hope, to an eternity of progressive improvement and happiness.

My friends, I can extend these remarks no further. Believe me, whatever we may call ourselves, whatever, in the hour of occasional reflection, we may wish to be, it remains as certain as the word of God, he that hath not the spirit of Christ is none of his, and the fruit of this spirit will always be righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. May God correct our errors, inspire our breasts, and teach us to feel the spirit of his religion.

SERMON VIII.

RELIGIOUS SERIOUSNESS.

MATTHEW, XXII. 5.

BUT THEY MADE LIGHT OF IT, AND WENT THEIR WAY.

THE difference in the circumstances of Christians at the present day, and at the introduction of the gospel, is truly astonishing. The change in the external circumstances of the church, and of course in the nature of the temptations to which men are exposed upon assuming the christian name, merit, my friends, our most serious consideration. Then it was a name of unequalled reproach. Christians were everywhere at first confounded by the pagan world with the Jews, among whom the new religion took its rise; and the name of Jew was then synonymous with all that was base, odious, and despicable. The situation of Christians among the Jews themselves, was even less tolerable than among heathens. They were regarded as apostates from Moses and

traitors to God. The assemblies of the persecuted disciples were at first held in secret, often under ground, and usually in the night. He who had the courage to enter this community, renounced, by this single act, every worldly prospect, and not seldom all the peace and credit of his life. Often was the Christian obliged to sever the tenderest ties of consanguinity, and, instead of love, to meet with hatred; instead of honor, with reproach; instead of peace, with persecution; instead of consequence, with contempt and obscurity. Do you ask, what was sufficient to induce them to these sacrifices? I answer in a word, Truth. Do you ask, what they gained in the loss of all the world esteemed? I answer, The power of God, which passeth all understanding.

How altered is the condition of the church! The little band of twelve disciples has grown into a vast multitude, which no man can number. Eighteen centuries have been adding, with increasing rapidity, to the numbers, the wealth, the security, the consequence, the triumphs of the christian world. The profession of Christians is no longer a badge of an enviable, or a dishonorable distinction. A name which was once the signal of suffering, is now hardly a mark of attention. The Christian, like others, accumulates his wealth in safety; like others, he wears his honors thick upon him. He mingles with the bustling, the pleasurable, and the gay, and no finger of scorn is

pointed at him. He may be obscure and useless, and no one explores his retreat; he may be famous, and no one plots against his elevation. Without are no fightings, within are no fears; and the harrassed and humbled Jesus, who had not where to lay his head, might, if he were to return again to earth, repose every night under the rich canopies and lofty ceilings of thousands who bear his name, and feast every day at tables where it would be necessary to work no miracle to furnish food for the guests. All, all is peaceful, except the inquietude of ambition, the insatiableness of avarice, and the mutual prejudices, and conflicting interests of the followers of the humble Jesus.

Whence, then, this mighty transformation? Can it be that a community, which originally grew by persecution and contempt, retains its proper character, when there is neither reproach nor suffering to retard nor to promote it? Have we now nothing to contend with, that is worth resisting? nothing now to fear, that can fill us with anxiety, or kindle us with hope? Would to God that the dread of religious sloth, the dangers of worldliness, the temptations to forget our character as Christians, were able to bind us as closely together as the scorn and cruelty of enemies from without! It may be, that the dreadful days of Nero and Dioclesian are not to be recollected with horror. It may be, more souls are now perishing in the debilitating air of peace, than were lost to God in

all the tempest of persecution. It may be, that we have slumbered till the last blaze has flashed, and our lamps have gone out.

Of all the subjects which engage the attention of men, religion is unquestionably the most important, because it relates to the soul rather than to the body, to God as well as to society, to eternity as well as to the present world.

No man has ever thought seriously as he should do, on this subject, but it must return to him again with more force and frequency, after every new contemplation, tending continually to this point, to make religion not only the rule, but the business of his life. A man, who believes nothing of Christianity, may naturally consider it a subject of little importance; but he who is convinced of its truth, because he has thought of it, will not, cannot rest at that point. He will consider it incomparably the most important thing in life. It is that to which everything else may be sacrificed, if God should demand it; and this sacrifice may be made without justly exciting wonder, or supposing irrationality. He who is accustomed to consider himself in the light in which the gospel places us all, as a sinful creature, whose hope, here and hereafter, is only in the mercy of God; he who places heaven and hell before his sight, and feels that his utmost exertions are necessary to secure the one, and avoid the other, such a man, I say, must be as different from one who be-

lieves nothing of all this, as if a new sense had been imparted to him.

Unquestionably, one principal cause of the feeble hold which subjects of religion have upon the mind, is the fancied remoteness of their objects, and the spiritual nature of the subjects of religious contemplation. What is immediately perceptible, tangible, pleasurable, or profitable, excites more emotion than any of those spiritual truths, which a man must study his own heart in order to understand. To excite this attention is the great object of our preaching; and, to introduce my subject more immediately, I give you this anecdote of one of the most amiable men the world ever knew. In his last illness he was attended by a friend, who desired him, in his great wisdom and learning, to give him a short direction how to lead his life to the best advantage; to whom he only said, 'Be serious; this is my parting advice to you, as what comprehends everything else I have said, BE SERIOUS.

My friends, till this seriousness is in some way excited, our labors are useless. The language of the preacher rolls over the attention like the morning dewdrops from the leaf, which fall to the ground where they cannot be gathered up again. It is true, this serious temper may in some cases be produced by an alarming providence, a probing discourse, and even by private and inconsiderable occurrences, which the world does not observe.

In others, where this disposition is more allied to the natural temper, it may be insensibly gaining strength, as the character matures, though no very noticeable change, at any particular period, may have occurred to draw the observation of the world. It is of infinite importance, especially for the rising generation, to know and feel that this seriousness is not enthusiasm ; that if what the gospel reveals is true, and we have so much to fear and so much to hope for, beyond the limits of this mortal life, it is a subject which no rational man can long think of, without the most solemn impressions. Our levity or inattention cannot affect their truth, and it is equally certain that every moment that we waste, is bringing us nearer to the time, when we shall be satisfied of the reality of what we are now only urged to believe.

I shall now proceed to point out the difference between that seriousness which is the result of deep impressions of religion, and some other states of mind, which may be mistaken for it, or, at least, are thought to supply its place ; and then I shall offer what I believe to be some of the characteristics of religious seriousness.

In the first place, there is in some men a certain constitutional moderation and sedateness of mind, which passes for a serious temper. These are persons of extreme regularity of life ; men who are never thrown off their guard by violent emotions, either of joy or of apprehension, as to this world or the next. There is usually in such

characters a great fund of worldly wisdom and of prudence, which keeps them aloof from excesses, and disposes them always to wish that the world may go on as it has done. They are afraid of any novelty or change in the state of affairs immediately around them; and hence they are the advocates for a peaceable continuance of old habits. They are what are called steady men and are indeed of great value to the well-being of the community. They are held out to the young as examples of what they should aspire to imitate; and it is much to be desired that such a class of men, who are not the slaves of any visible vices, and not the promoters of any species of irregularity, should increase in a community and give it stability and respect. But the sedateness which arises merely from moderated passions or selfishness, and the sobriety proceeding merely from ancient and regular habits, are very different from that seriousness which is produced by an habitual contemplation of the solemn truths which the gospel unfolds to us. This constitutional solidity of character, may exist with the utmost indifference to religious truth. It may exist in a mind which never has been touched with the grand thought of eternity, and never has inquired, with trembling apprehension, what it shall do to be saved. That kind of religious insensibility, which presents nothing offensive in the external conduct, that uniform sobriety of deportment, which is never betrayed into any extravagance, which is perfectly

contented with itself, and conforms to the external faith of a community, is the most difficult disposition in the world to awaken. There is no reaching such a heart by the ordinary applications from the pulpit. It is almost impracticable to probe a conscience which has never seriously reproached itself. The character I have been describing is extremely common. It is not a religious, it is a selfish, though a regular character. The man of truly serious impressions is often exercised with the most solemn contemplations, the most moving anxieties, the most humble and devotional sentiments. Real seriousness offers a ground for continual exertion and improvement; but the mere sobriety of a worldly man, is always the same, always self-complacent, and therefore always stationary.

2. There is another class of serious men, which I choose to rank under this head, because their character, though more intellectual, is hardly less removed from the seriousness of a religious mind. I mean the class of sedentary and studious men, whose pursuits, though they are intellectual and interesting, are not sanctified by any reference to God. This kind of life is extremely apt to flatter a man's self-complacency, and draw him off from a serious consideration of the most important subjects in the world, the state of his own heart, and his relation to God and to eternity. It is a state of mind, which deceives the most thoughtful, because it engrosses him with contemplations,

which, though not as hallowed and sublime as those of religion, are yet very much above the ordinary occupations of the world. But this studious disposition may exist together with a total ignorance of the most secret faults and corruptions of the heart, the knowledge of which is the real foundation of a religious character.

3. Religious seriousness of temper is to be carefully distinguished from that constitutional melancholy, with which it is sometimes associated. It is a favorite habit with many men, to account for any instance of mental despondency or derangement, by ascribing it, when they can, to religious impressions. It is true that in some minds, predisposed to this dreadful disorder, it may perhaps be occasioned by new and alarming views of religion; and it is to be expected, that where the most solemn subjects have gained possession of a mind of this cast, they should contribute to that fearful melancholy, which the state of the health originally promoted, and even that they should appear most prominent in the thoughts and conversation of the person affected. But, even here, it is no more to be supposed that religion is the necessary source of such despondency, than so far as religion, when it gains possession of such a mind, must, from its very nature, engross it more completely than any other contemplations. The seriousness of a truly penitent mind is something different from any state of the body, or any disordered condition of the nerves. There is no more

religion in melancholy, abstractly considered, than there is in levity, or an excessive flow of animal spirits. On the contrary, where religious ideas are firmly established in the mind, where they are distinctly apprehended and properly associated with all the habits of thinking, they are the best security against the usual causes of despondency, and most effectually counteract the tendencies which the constitution may possess towards melancholy. Certain I am, that the careful observation of the character of the most humble and pious men, will correct this misapprehension. It is true, that a man of habitual seriousness, will see much levity in the world which he cannot approve, and much enjoyment, which he must regard as dangerous in its present effects, and in its future consequences. But still he will be always cheerful, always serene; he will be ready to follow the injunction of the apostle and 'rejoice always.'

Lastly; religious seriousness is to be carefully distinguished from that spirit of discontent and surly despondency, of which we see so many examples. It is one thing to be disappointed in our expectations from this world, and another to be really solicitous about our fate in the next. It is one thing to be dissatisfied with the lot which Providence assigns us here, and another to be so far interested in the prospect of futurity as to be indifferent to the pleasures and pursuits in which the world is engaged. It is one thing to despise

a pleasure, because we cannot share in it, and another to regard it with indifference, because it would interfere with our more serious pursuits. The pensive cast of a querulous man's temper, is not in any degree more favorable to religious impressions, than the vain and light frivolity of an unreflecting and giddy mind. The man of real seriousness, is also a man of humility. He compares himself as he is, with himself as he ought to be; and his dissatisfaction is not with the world, but with himself. He is not depressed, because he is not thought of sufficient consequence in society, or because he cannot fashion his situation to his mind; but he is serious when he looks at his own ill deserts. He is dissatisfied with the world, it is true; not because he has been disappointed in his expectations, but because he sees so much to shun, and so much to fear. The thought of death makes him serious; but it is a thought which he does not on that account banish, and if he is concerned to die, it is not about what he shall leave, but at what he shall find hereafter. Ambition, envy, and other selfish passions may cast a gloom over the features and depress the spirits. But these are not the passions which make men serious; they rather shut up the mind against impressions of real devotion and the access of religious truth.

II. In what remains of this discourse I shall endeavour to present to you, as I proposed, in the second place, a few plain characteristics of a truly serious mind. What I shall suggest will be easily

applicable by us to our individual characters, and will not be in danger of being confounded with the effects of that worldly sedateness which we have before described.

1. In the first place, a man whose heart is habitually subject to religious influences, will not indulge himself on any occasion in that levity with which religious subjects are sometimes inconsiderately treated. He not only finds it impossible to speak contemptuously or lightly of God, of our Saviour, of the rewards and punishments of another life, but he will not even indulge himself in rashly condemning the mistaken, but conscientious opinions of pious men. Everything connected with eternity or the future condition of the soul, becomes, by this single alliance, a subject of too great importance to be made ridiculous. He is convinced that any religious impressions, however irrational, are much to be preferred to that deadly indifference, which leaves religion entirely out of its meditations. Everything in conversation, or in conduct, which tends to weaken the influence of religious impressions, or to excite the doubts or fortify the prejudices of the world against the gospel, he observes with pain. It is a sensibility in the cause of God which he does not endeavour to conceal. He is willing that the world should know, that he considers the Deity too awful a being to be made the subject of an impertinent remark, and the uncertainties of the future world too dreadful to be the sport of foolish contempt

or thoughtless vanity. He is hurt by everything in the character and conduct of others, which tends to place subjects of everlasting importance in the light of indifferent facts, or convenient customs.

2. We shall perceive another criterion of religious seriousness, if we attend to the manner in which we observe the public ordinances of God's worship. We can easily inform ourselves, by a careful examination of our motives, whether we come up to God's house of prayer, merely from long custom or decent formality, or from a solemn regard to the nature of the duty and of the Being to whom worship is addressed; whether we appear here only to indulge one of the varieties of curiosity, or whether our hearts are really solicitous to worship God, to humble ourselves, and gain instruction or encouragement in duty. We can judge also of the seriousness of our tempers by the state of mind in which we observe the exercises of worship. If we find our thoughts dissipated, and our attention wandering, it implies that we are not sufficiently impressed with the solemnity of our employment. It argues also strongly against the seriousness of our religious views, if we are more disposed to be wearied with the tediousness, than satisfied with the devotion of the service; if we are more alive to any impropriety with which it may be conducted, than to the impressive nature of adoration, the humbling influence of confession, the tranquillizing power of supplication, and the

solemnity of all the subjects which are brought up to our attention. I hesitate not to lay it down as an infallible maxim, that he who is not serious in the worship of God, knows nothing of religion, nothing of himself. The fear of God has never fallen upon him; the sense of God's excellence, or of his own unworthiness, has never obtained possession of his mind.

3. A third test of the seriousness of our dispositions we shall find, whenever we consider the nature of our private thoughts on this subject, and especially of our private devotions. Perhaps, in the bustle of life and the rapid succession of amusements and pleasures, we may have been betrayed into follies which we cannot approve, and occupations which shut out religion from our thoughts. But if we possess a really serious mind, whenever we can retire within ourselves and engage in our secret meditations, we shall find our sense of the importance of religious truth returning, with increased influence, to our minds; we shall find that the world, in which we have been dissipated, will only have refreshed our interest and enhanced our satisfaction in religious contemplations.

If, on the contrary, we find that our pleasures in society have only made our devotions cold, our meditations irksome, our religious views indistinct, our expressions formal, and have shed over our minds a distaste for our duty and our religion, it is time to consider whether we have ever been

seriously engaged in the service of God. It is time to consider whether our religion is not a mere compromise only between God and the world, our conscience and our passions.

I could enlarge on this subject, but I forbear. I will only say to you, my friends, if there is anything on earth to make a man serious, it is death. And uncertain as we are of its distance, and sure as we are of its approach, within a few years at most, the man whom this thought does not solemnize, is not within the reach of other considerations. Death! my friends! Is it a mere word, or is it an event on which everything depends? Whose are we? Whither are we tending? What is our destination? Has God spoken to us on this subject, or has he not? If he has, can it be thought of for a moment with indifference? Till you have made this, then, the subject of your most serious considerations, I can say nothing which can reach you; and when you have regarded it with the importance which it demands, I can say nothing to enhance its solemnity.

SERMON IX.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE AS SHOWN IN THE HISTORY OF REVELATION.

Acts, XV. 18.

KNOWN UNTO GOD ARE ALL HIS WORKS FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD.

In a former discourse I attempted to set before you those proofs of the providence of God, which are derived from a contemplation of his character, as learned from the appearances of nature. In the present I wish to bring to your view those striking evidences of God's superintendence of the world which are found in the history of revelation.

Before we proceed, however, to this part of our subject, allow me to say, that if there is sufficient reason to believe that God has ever interposed to reveal his own character and will, in any other way than by the unassisted exercise of human reason in the contemplation of his works, this is in itself a satisfactory proof of his providence. Revelation, then, is in itself the most substantial proof which can be offered of this great truth. But has God ever thus interfered in the concerns of mor-

tals? It has been the invariable opinion of mankind that he has; and the histories which are contained in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, are full of such relations. Till, therefore, some reason can be given, that the facts which we find these books to contain, are impossible or improbable, they are unquestionably entitled to the same credit with any other authentic works.

These books contain also many remarkable predictions. If, then, it can be once made to appear that any one of these prophecies has been circumstantially accomplished, the proof is complete of the providence and superintendence of the Divinity over the affairs of men.

But I wish to enter more deeply into this subject of revelation, and to show you, if possible, from a survey of the different dispensations of which the bible gives us an account, that God has, from the first, maintained a moral care of mankind; that he has been seasonably providing for their religious wants, and has been carrying on, from the creation of the world, a vast scheme of human improvement, which illustrates his natural and moral providence.

The bible, my friends, is distinguished from all other books that were ever written, or, at least, that now exist, in this circumstance; that it contains the history of these operations and purposes of God. Open it where you will, and you find traces of these operations. God is the grand object which it presents. His work is the great busi-

ness which it discloses. His purposes are the grand points to which all its narratives direct us. In this book man appears under a different aspect from that in which he appears elsewhere; as a creature under the moral government of God, and the subject of God's retributive and provisory care; and the most vast and interesting views are opened of human destination and hopes.

It is with a mixture of gratitude and of awe, that I look into this book. It contains the history of God and man in their connexion and intercommunication, and it is the only work which throws any satisfactory light on the origin, and progress, and destination of the human race, as moral creatures. We find here, it is true, many extraordinary relations, adapted to the infancy of mankind, and gradually becoming less frequent, as the faculties were unfolded and the moral notions of mankind were established. But even in the history of these, we find the same proofs of a wise providence, in the order and successive perfection of the different dispensations of religion, that we find in the natural growth and intellectual progress of individuals. This proof of the divine superintendence I wish now to trace out with you.

In the Jewish and Christian scriptures we have a history of a portion at least of this superintendence, and the portion in which we are most interested; of what may have been vouchsafed to other natures, we know not the manner, nor the

extent. After ascribing to one Supreme God the creation and peopling of the world, they go on to explain the mode by which God maintained his government over his creatures, and gave them a just sense of religious and moral obligation. During this period of the world's infancy, we find that visible intercourse and audible communications of the Deity were common. Before mankind had learnt to deduce from the view of nature, any notion of one Supreme Intelligence, or had derived from experience any directions of conscience, or any knowledge of their real good, God condescended to instruct them frequently and copiously in the most necessary knowledge.

The history tells us that he placed the first pair in a garden, under a prohibition to eat of the fruit of a certain tree; but they yet, yielding to a temptation, disobeyed and became subject to the dreadful consequences of transgression.

In this original dispensation there is shadowed forth to us the situation of mankind as moral beings. We are destined to a species of happiness which depends upon a previous probation. The nature of virtue and happiness, as God has constituted it, everywhere supposes a capacity of transgression, and a period of trial. In the history then of our first parents, we have the first elements of a moral government, and everything which we know of God, justifies his appointment of this original dispensation.

The subsequent condition of the world, as a state of labor, difficulty, temptation, and death, is represented as the consequence of this transgression of Adam. However we may choose to account for it, we may be certain that it was a part of the original plan of God, in training up human creatures for a superior state, that this should be the condition of humanity, and there is no reason why we should not be satisfied with the scripture account of its introduction.

These ancient books contain many other accounts of the appearance and interposition of God, all directed to promote the same purpose, the growth of virtue and knowledge in the world. Hence the deluge, which swept away a corrupt race, when Noah was preserved to keep up the knowledge of God, and to commence a new era among men. The accounts which we have of the frequent appearances of the Deity in those early ages, are perfectly suitable to the infant state of mankind. All the operations of nature, and all the changes and events of life, are there uniformly ascribed to the power and will of the Creator; and even whatever consequences follow the will of men, are there imputed to the providence of God.

In process of time, we find that one peculiar people was selected from the multitude of nations, to give to the rest of the world, by their whole history and fate, a visible specimen of God's providence. Abraham is called from the midst of his

idolatrous kindred, and his family are made the depositaries of the religious knowledge which God chose to vouchsafe to mankind. This destination, sealed by the adoption of a peculiar rite, was introduced with reference to future consequences of vast importance to mankind. From this circumstance we may date all the religious knowledge which we now enjoy, and to it we owe this book of God, this church which has existed, through so many hazardous fortunes, to the present hour.

The manner in which God exhibited his providence towards the family and posterity of Abraham, is a subject of most curious contemplation. The purpose for which they were prepared was the most noble which can be imagined; to preserve the knowledge of one true God, in the midst of an idolatrous world, and not only so, but to be the examples of the moral government of this God, in the instance of national remuneration in this world, for obedience to a prescribed and positive law, and to be the depositaries of those predictions, by which the world was to be prepared for the Messiah and that evangelical dispensation under which we live.

The history of this wonderful people, the posterity of Abraham, is full of proofs of some great purpose for which they were so greatly distinguished. Their original deliverance from bondage in Egypt, their peregrinations in the wilderness, their detachment from other nations, and

indeed the peculiar notions of their own importance, which their singular fate generated among them, were all calculated to preserve them from the contagion of idolatry, and the corruptions of the surrounding world. They had perpetual proofs of the providence of the Supreme Jehovah. Punishment invariably followed their apostasies; and last of all, by their captivity in Babylon, the remains of idolatrous propensities were rooted out of their minds, and they preserve even to the present day, wherever they have been found, and in every successive age, the singular belief of the great principles of theism, and the unity of God.

By the Jewish dispensation, mankind were taught, as I conceive, in the way of national retribution, the moral government of God in this world. But a greater scene was to be disclosed, and the character of God, and the destination of man, as it extends to future ages and another life, was to be the subject of another revelation.

Predictions had been successively given of some great deliverer who was hereafter to appear, more fully charged with the purposes of the Most High. It was foretold that he was to put an end to this more imperfect dispensation, burdened as it was with peculiar ceremonies, and ritual observances; a Deliverer, who, by his example, precepts, and death, was to give stronger evidence of some important principles of conduct, and to discover others, which had either been not revealed

or only obscurely intimated under preceding dispensations. Under him mankind were to be brought to a more perfect subjection to the moral government of God, and to be formed into one great society, holy and happy, and to go on improving till they reach the city of the living God, the new Jerusalem.

The distinctions which had been suffered to exist for the preservation of the Jews in their allegiance, were now to be abolished, Jew and Gentile brought into the same community, and God to be represented as the common father of all men, exercising his government over them with reference to a future life, when all would be made subject to an individual retribution and remuneration.

While our Saviour was on earth, you know the powers which were imparted to him for the confirmation of his doctrine, and the authority that was committed to him in heaven and on earth, all for the purpose of establishing this last dispensation of the Most High, and for propagating and completing his religion. Miracles were necessary to gain attention to the gospel and to give it authority on its introduction; but you will acknowledge that a perpetuity of miracles would not only weaken that very attention, but destroy all that authority. When therefore God has sufficiently promulgated a revelation, he leaves it to ordinary and human means of preservation. It is left to the conduct of that nation or society in

which it is planted, to be handed down by their care to posterity. It is a system of divine doctrines and established rules of life, and must be subject to the common methods of instruction and taught like other sciences.

The consequences of this dispensation we find in the effects which it has already produced, and we believe will continue to produce, in the world. We know that much of the cruelty and superstition of paganism disappeared; that new lights of truth and virtue burst in upon the minds of men; and that multitudes were transformed into new, holy, wise, and pious creatures. Instead of the idolatry of the Gentiles and the ceremonial observances of the Jews, there arose on their ruins, a rational and manly piety, produced by the new views of God's parental character and gracious designs. We know that from this era there appeared among men a spirit of universal and tender charity, which was before unknown and unimagined.

The religion of Jesus Christ gave a new character to the minds of thousands. It elevated, it purified, and spiritualized those who were before sensual and worldly. It gave them ideas of happiness superior to all other felicity. It taught them to despise the honors and the terrors of the world, and to aspire after the divine favor as an end, and the divine likeness as their glory.

These are justly called the fruits of the spirit; for it is the gospel, and the gospel only, when

properly understood and heartily received, which has ever produced them. We find in the first periods of the church, that it was remarkably productive of these effects, and the change is very striking when we consider that the gospel was preached to men, who had been born in the darkness of heathenism, and under the bondage of Jewish ceremonies.

And are there no effects of this kind yet produced? Has not the gospel now the same salutary efficacy? Is not its best influence to be traced in society? Is the purpose of God defeated? No, it cannot be, as long as the religion of Christ retains, as it ever must, the same credibility. The revolutions of the church, the successive periods of revival and declension, the temporary triumphs of infidelity, are all provided for in the plan of the Most High. The gospel is yet a powerful instrument in God's moral government. The Christian believes that all the revolutions which the christian world has known, were foreseen, and provided for in this last dispensation, and relying upon the accomplishment of past predictions, the Christian is warranted to entertain the confident expectation of the glorious and universal triumph of the religion of Jesus Christ.

This view of the divine dispensations suggests, among others, the following remarks.

There is a general uniformity of character in all these specimens of God's moral care of mankind. Goodness and wisdom characterize them all.

As they are, also, instances alike of pure goodness and of unmerited care. There is no injustice or partiality in their limited introduction, though the whole race of men that has existed on the earth, may not at any time have been admitted to share in the same degrees of supernatural assistance. In every case men will be accepted according to what they have, and not according to what they have not. God is not obliged by any principle to give to all men the means of the same degree of perfection, either in this world or the next; and those whose capacity for revelation falls below that of those who have the advantages of a birth and education in Christendom, will find a reward suited to the enlargement of their minds, or a punishment proportioned to the degree of the advantages which they have abused. To whomsoever much is given, of him only will much be required.

We may observe one common intention running through each of these dispensations, and that is, to promote the virtue and happiness of our race; and though we are not placed in precisely the same circumstances with our first parents, to whom the original revelation was made, yet our situation agrees with theirs in this; we are upon probation as they were, in order to form tempers of holiness, and in order to become worthy of eternal life.

It cannot fail to be remarked, that, as every preceding dispensation seems to have prepared the way for that which succeeded it, so they were all

severally adapted to the capacities, the progress, and the existing moral and religious state of mankind.

Every preceding dispensation seems also to have contained some intimations of that under which we live; and from some expressions in the scriptures we have strong reasons to conclude that this is ultimate, and that all that God intends to do for mankind in the way of supernatural interposition, he has done by Jesus Christ.

These dispensations, or the history of God's moral government, furnish subjects of sublime and grateful contemplation to angels and to men. They represent God in the fairest and most interesting of lights, when we consider that all these have been known to him from the beginning of the world, and that his parental care discovers itself in every communication, which God has made since man was created.

There are many circumstances in this history which once appeared unintelligible, but which now we more clearly understand. Such, in particular, was the rejection and consequent fortune of the Jewish nation, once the people of God, which made the apostle exclaim, 'Oh! the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!' Now we perceive how indispensable it was to make the divine origin of the gospel more apparent, and what strength it continues to add to its proofs.

If there are difficulties which yet serve to exercise our humanity and our study, we must not be surprised. The great apostasies in Christendom, the growth of infidelity, and the present state of the world, are all preparatory to some more glorious era in the church. The morning of the Reformation was preceded by greater darkness, moral and intellectual, than we have since known, and it is to be hoped that we have not reached the meridian of this day, and that we shall not be obliged to pass through another night of religious darkness before the purposes of God shall be finished. But however this may be, we have nothing to do but to preserve minds sincerely desirous of inquiring after the truth, meekly submissive to what God has revealed, and patiently to persevere in well-doing through all the changes of the present dispensation. To us Christians this is the language of God's grace; 'Walk thou thy way to the end, for after all thy trials and disquietudes, if thou preservest thy integrity and thy faith, thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.'

SERMON X.

SOURCES OF INFIDELITY.

HEBREWS, III. 12.

TAKE HEED, BRETHREN, LEST THERE BE IN YOU AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF.

BETWEEN the two propositions that the gospel is true, and that it is false; between the belief that it is the revelation of God, and the opinion that it is the work of men, the chasm is so vast that it is impossible there should not be some great difference in the minds or in the hearts of those men, who, with similar advantages and means, can form different conclusions upon the subject. The question with respect to religion amounts in fact to this; Is there, or is there not, any satisfactory assurance that this life is not the termination of man's existence? Are all the hopes, the fears, and the anticipations of mankind, that there is an eternity to come, merely uncertain and delusive suggestions?

The inquiry whether the gospel be true, involves in it the question, whether God, who has given us

our mental powers, our moral sense, and our anticipations of another life, has ever interposed for the salvation of this part of his creation, or whether man has always been left, upon a subject of such importance, to the weakness of his own unassisted reason, and the corruption of his actual condition. It involves the question, whether the Jewish history, at present the most authentic in the world, is a mere fable, and especially whether that wonderful event of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which so many great and good men have sacrificed their lives to authenticate, is a gross delusion and imposition. In short, by the admission or rejection of Christianity, the aspect of the world is changed. If this source of hopes, fears, comforts, restraints, reasonings, and meditations, is blotted out of the human mind, its whole character must be transformed.

Undoubtedly in a fair and uncorrupted mind the bias would be altogether in favor of religion; for it makes of man a creature so much superior to what he would be without it, it raises him so much nearer heaven, and opens to him such sublime and exhilarating views with respect to God, to himself, and to society, that we should think the world would press to receive it, and that without it man would consider himself but half enlightened. Alas! it is not so. Thousands are busy in chasing from their minds every suggestion in its favor, and stopping their ears, lest the news of the gospel of peace should gain access to their hearts.

The object of this discourse will be to explain the sources of unbelief. I fear we shall find that, in the language of the apostle, 'If our gospel is hid, it is hid to them who are lost.'

I. In the first place, I do not hesitate to say, that the least dishonorable source of infidelity is ignorance. Many think that to differ from the vulgar is to be superior to them, and that it is a proof of having thought deeply, to be able to start objections to the most common truths. But of all the proofs of human weakness, I know none greater, than that indolence of mind, which shows itself in the disposition which is satisfied with proposing difficulties, instead of searching for truths. The truth of the gospel is a fact, of which at first it required only the exercise of the senses to satisfy one's self. Of course there was no need of learning, to be a well informed Christian. But now, at this distance of time, it has become a work of superior knowledge and fairness, to understand and illustrate its true foundation, and a very superficial employment to suggest objections, because time has already furnished them to our hands. It is no longer a test of superior sagacity to doubt the truth of a religion which the most gifted minds have believed, relying upon great and various and impregnable proofs, though few of those who receive it, have ever examined the whole grounds of their faith, or felt the most serious objections.

It may be remarked, without danger of contradiction, that of those who reject the gospel, the

majority are extremely ignorant of scripture, and in this branch of necessary knowledge are very much inferior to many Christians, whom they venture to despise. Their reading has been in a different direction. Hence, all they know of the Old and New Testament, is, perhaps, that there are passages in them which are strange or unintelligible, and thus they venture to decide upon this most grand and solemn question, often without having read, much more having studied the book, which reveals the destination of the human race.

I may venture yet further to assert, that few of those who reject Christianity, possess much of the knowledge which is necessary to a thorough understanding of the scriptures. They do not consider how unreasonable it is to expect that books written, as many of those of the bible were, more than two thousand years ago, and in a dead language, should be as intelligible as the books which appear every day, in their vernacular tongue. They do not consider, that it would have required a perpetual miracle to preserve the meaning in every place from obscurity, the text from corruption, or the pen of every translator from mistakes. In consequence of this ignorance and narrowness of mind, they are disgusted with everything which they cannot at once reconcile with modern opinions, language, and manners ; they are overthrown with every difficulty, and find only arguments for infidelity in everything which they do not understand. They are men of business, perhaps, and

have not the previous information necessary to understand their bibles; they are men of wit, and think that everything which is not sparkling or ingenious, is dull; they are men in office, and have no time to think deeply of these subjects, which, they are inclined to believe, are at least of doubtful importance; or they are men of fashion, and do not find that religion is ever thought of in polite circles. Thus they live with the reputation of superior wisdom, because they are really ignorant of what they venture to despise, alive only to objections, and only insensible to proofs.

II. But it must, in the second place, be impartially granted, that another source of infidelity is found in the misrepresentations which have been made of the christian doctrine. Subjects of doubtful disputation have been exalted into articles of christian faith, and men have been required to believe, not merely that God has given us a revelation, but also just such a revelation as men, in language unauthorised by scripture, have chosen to frame. One man, travelling through countries which are called christian, meets at every step the mummery of unmeaning ceremonies, the superstition of an enslaved people and hypocritical priests, and he forgets that all this may not be Christianity. Another, of a serious and candid mind, is perhaps thrown into the vortex of fanaticism. He finds Christianity is made to consist in agitations of the passions, and is explained in a rhapsodical dialect, which to him is utterly unin-

telligible. He sees the effect of this mechanical excitement, for which he cannot account; he sees the influence of religious sympathy upon the minds of thousands, and he falls into this snare, that reason can have little to do with a system which encourages such follies, and that it was originally altogether the delusion of weak and wicked minds.

How few, my friends, of those who believe in Christianity, have taken their religion from the New Testament! They have received all their ideas on this most interesting subject from their nurses, their catechisms, or their preachers; and when they have found, that some of the doctrines, which they had received for Christianity, were irreconcileably opposed to the subsequent discoveries of their minds, instead of informing themselves of the real doctrines of scripture, they have rejected the whole as unintelligible or absurd.

It must be allowed also, that some men have insensibly slid into infidelity by attempts to simplify the system of Christianity. They have concluded that what was so very reasonable and intelligible, could not be a subject of special revelation, and thus have they brought themselves to a refined species of Deism, in which there is left nothing supernatural, nothing peculiarly proper for miraculous interposition. But they have soon found, that the difficulties in mere natural religion, without that humility which is the real foundation of all faith, become insuperable, and the transition is not difficult to Atheism and universal doubt. The

progress of innumerable minds has been from irrational views of Christianity, to total unbelief. My friends, if we would all first satisfy ourselves of the historical evidence of the gospel facts, and then each for himself carefully study the New Testament, and find his religion there, we should not see so many dogmatical, nor so many incredulous minds; we should not see the Calvinist passing into the Deist, the Atheist, the universal skeptic, and through mere want of repose, falling back into the bosom of an infallible church. No, it is from our having taken our religious opinions from authority, and not from the scriptures, that we see so much uncertainty and contradiction among Protestants.

III. It must thirdly be admitted, that another source of unbelief is pride. We now draw nearer to the meaning of our text, and we shall find reasons enough to justify the censure of the apostle when he calls it an evil heart of unbelief. A superficial observer may be inclined to accuse us of uncharitableness when we say, in the language of the prophet, 'the pride of thine heart hath deceived thee;' and we shall be asked, How can a man avoid believing upon proper evidence? I answer, that there is nothing so easy as to avoid conviction. In every question which is not intuitive or demonstrable, in every question of fact or of opinion, where nothing more than moral certainty can be obtained, perhaps there is not a subject in the world, in which men's previous dispositions

do not promote or retard their belief. We see instances of this in the plainest matters of fact of every day's occurrence, facts which, with precisely the same grounds of belief, are rejected or admitted, according to the party, the prejudices, the hopes, or the fears of the individual.

Do you ask how pride may have so great a share in the conclusions which men form on the subject of religion? I answer in the first place, the gospel appears upon the face of it to contain a religion, not for this man or that, who may wish to know more than his neighbour, but for the poor as well as the rich, the low as well as the high, the illiterate as well as the learned. It is a blessing which is accessible to any man, without the aid of any of those exterior distinctions, which constitute the pride of so many weak, and of so many superior understandings. The man who embraces the gospel is sensible that in this act there is nothing which distinguishes him from the vulgar, and he is unwilling to believe, even on satisfactory evidence, what his poor neighbour believes without any evidence at all. The very first principle of Christianity is humility. It implies that something has been done for man, which he could not do for himself, and he who is not willing to acknowledge his dependence upon God, and who is not prepared to believe that God may have revealed something to the humblest understanding, which his own unaided reason could not have discovered, and cannot now completely com-

prehend in all its connexions with other truths, is at an immense distance from the reception of Christianity. Nothing is more hostile to pride, either of intellect or station, than the gospel. Every line of it teaches dependence upon God, ignorance of his purposes, and reliance upon his mercy alone. It raises the lowly and depresses the ambitious. It scorns the pageantry of the world, and assures us that, in the eye of one Being at least, there is no respect of persons. Few, very few are the minds which can come to the examination of such a religion with unbiassed affections.

IV. A fourth and more important source of unbelief remains to be examined; and that is, the previous disinclination which a man of corrupt and vicious character must necessarily find in himself, to a system so pure, and intellectual as that of the gospel.

Here I shall be arrested at once, by the reproach that it is invidious and uncharitable to charge to the corruptions of a man's heart, rather than to any other cause, that he does not think as we do upon any speculative subject, however important it may be in our opinion; and you will tell me that such an argument is unfair, because, from the very nature of it, it must be unanswerable. You will tell me, that no one has a right to make use of it but God, who searches the heart, and who therefore alone knows the powers, opportunities, and unavoidable prejudices of every man's mind.

But this is not a just statement of the question. We do not say that he who rejects a system of belief which we consider true, as well as pure and holy in the highest degree, proves by this simple act, that it is a corruption of heart that leads him to this rejection. No; for however strong the presumption, that his understanding is in this case biassed by his passions, it belongs neither to you nor to me, nor to any other observer, to pronounce upon the fact, but to Him only who seeth not as man seeth. We do not say this. We say only that a man who is corrupt, or selfish, or worldly, will be antecedently disinclined to believe a system which condemns his favorite propensities. We do not say that his unbelief is infallibly to be charged to his corruption; we say only that his corruption must have a tendency to prevent his belief. Do you not see that the former is judging a man's heart and character from what he professes to believe, and the latter is merely showing what a man's character and propensities are likely to incline him to believe?

The influence also of a man's depraved habits or affections is unavoidably greater on this question of religion than on any other, because it is, of all the questions which can exercise the human mind, the least of a merely speculative question. You would be as likely to believe that there was such a man as Alexander, or to admit one of the axioms of mathematics, with a corrupt as a pure heart, with a dishonest as with a fair under-

standing. But it is not merely a speculative inquiry whether God has, or has not, revealed his will to mankind. It is not merely a matter of curiosity, whether you are or are not accountable to any other tribunal than that of society, and whether a future and eternal existence depends, or not, upon your habits and character in this life. These are questions which involve the whole of man's duty and expectations. You must be an entirely different creature, if these have, from what you may be if they have not, been the subjects of an authenticated revelation from God himself.

But you will tell me that a man's duties remain the same, whether there has been a special revelation of them or not; the dictates of conscience are equally powerful, and the law of nature remains in all its force. Conscience! my friends, what is the authority of conscience without the belief of the existence of God? And what is the value of a belief in the existence of God, if that God has discovered no interest in the affairs of the world, and there should be no future state where his righteous and fearful retributions shall be dispensed? It is of little consequence that a God exists, if you have no more to do with him than the bare appearance of the present state of things discovers to you, and if you have nothing to fear or to hope from him, but for the few years you have to live on earth, and even during this period, if you believe no more of him, than that such a being exists somewhere in the universe.

Can you shelter yourselves under this miserable subterfuge? Look at the standard which the faithless man of the world sets up for himself, and answer me, does it lay those restraints? Does it condemn those indulgences in which irreligious men allow themselves, without the loss of much tranquillity, or of much credit in this world? Will a man who lives only for the present world approach to the purity of one who lives by faith, and not by sight? In the same proportion, then, as the purity of the rule, and the greatness of the sanctions of revelation exceed the laws of society and the fears of present inconvenience, must the indisposition of a depraved man to the gospel be stronger than to any other truths which the mind can receive.

Again; the man who knows the least of Christianity, knows that its spirit, if not its verbal precepts, is always at war with many of the maxims by which the world is governed, and is plainly contradictory to the sensual propensities of the human heart. You cannot open the New Testament but you meet with some maxim like these. 'Cleanse yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.' 'He that will be my disciple, let him deny himself,' says our Saviour, 'and take up his cross, and follow me.' 'This is a hard saying, who can hear it.' This, however, is the character of the gospel morality; and the sensual man discerns in this first glance of the features of Chris-

tianity, the expression of an enemy's countenance, and he turns away in fear or aversion.

Here is a man who is devoted to the perpetual accumulation of wealth, so that his ruling passion is the acquisition of property. Surely that religion can excite nothing but aversion in him, which elevates the poor to a level with himself; which denounces the avaricious and worldly spirit that places all its pride and confidence in wealth, and which even goes so far as to inform him, that circumstances may arise, when, under pain of God's displeasure, he must willingly give up all this mighty mass of treasure for the sake of truth and virtue. Such a man would gladly be excused from believing so hard a system, and willing to remain at least undecided, if he cannot with an easy conscience utterly reject it.

There is a man of an irascible temper, who cannot endure opposition or forget an injury. Surely he will not receive, without infinite difficulty, a religion which is utterly at war with his passions, and with passions, too, which his commerce with the world informs him are not very dishonorable, and which most of the men in similar situations with himself are disposed above all others to excuse. How willingly will such a man consent to remain in doubt of the authority of the meek and forgiving religion of Jesus!

Take the innumerable slaves of sensuality, who live for the gratification of appetite, or the more gross pleasures of voluptuousness. Can they con-

sent to believe that a religion has the express sanction of God in its favor, which declares that neither whoremongers nor adulterers shall have part with the children of God; which commands us to crucify the flesh, and abstain from those lusts which war against the soul? Oh! no. Who loves to have his dream of security interrupted? Who will give his hand to a guide to lead him to a spot where an abyss of perdition opens under his feet? a spot where he thought the ground was firm and solid under him? Who will bare his bosom to that piercing light, which lays open the miseries of his heart? It may perhaps be false, such a man will say; why should I disturb myself with additional proofs of its truth?

Let those who would quench this heavenly light, let those who would reject the gospel, consider for a moment where they would leave the world, and to what they would reduce it. Suppose the gospel of Jesus rejected, and the restraints of Christianity universally thrown off, the belief of its most alarming, and its most comforting truths alike discarded. Suppose the faith of the world, ofter wandering up and down among the speculations of unassisted reason, left to find for itself a place to rest. Suppose the authority of the sacred books overthrown, the history of Jesus of Nazareth rejected as an idle tale, the institutions of his religion without support and without respect, and all the fears and hopes of a future life banished like the dreams of heathen mythology. Then

let us revisit this earth, emancipated from Christianity, and in rebellion against God, and what should we find? The minds of the few virtuous torn with doubts, and the understandings of the common people enveloped in gross darkness; the beds of the dying planted with anxiety; the bereaved sunk in stupid amazement, or unconsoled anguish; the penitent without relief, the impenitent without fear; the dying and the dead alike without knowledge or hope; the poor without friends; the rich without restraint; the cries of suffering humanity ascending without the hope of being heard, and the world left without a Saviour to grope its way to eternal life.

Let him who loves not to look at this picture, reflect before he rejects the gospel. If it is true, it is as interesting to this man, as to that; if it is true, our salvation is as much involved in its reception as that of the humblest creature to whom it has been preached. Blot it out, and the darkness which would ensue, would envelope in the same gloom the vale of humble life, and the summits of human greatness. Blot it out, and the world would be condemned to revolve through the same ages of confusion and corruption, which preceded the appearance of the Saviour.

Christians, allow me to address to you a few words of exhortation, in relation to this subject, in which you are so deeply interested.

1. In the first place, know on what foundation you stand. You may have a faith perhaps suffi-

cient for your own satisfaction; but as you are not to live for yourselves alone in this world, so ought you not to believe for yourselves alone. The situation of the world is such, that the cause of truth may suffer as much from your inability to defend it, as even from your open violation of its dictates. The time has now come when the gospel is not to be maintained by the bare authority of any man, how transcendent soever may be his understanding. The objections of the unbeliever are ready furnished to his hands; the replies to these objections are not to be learnt from every man's mouth. The gospel is not to be supported by saying that it was the faith of our ancestors, or that we have so found it in our catechism. If you are not ready to give the true reasons for the hope that is in you, you stand upon an insecure foundation. The true foundation of the gospel, is in its truth as an historic fact. From this view of the question unbelievers have always shrunk; and it is this which you should be best prepared to establish. If those who were the most interested to ascertain the miraculous facts of the gospel, can be shown to have believed them, we have every reason to believe them; and if these facts stand upon stronger grounds of probability than any other facts in history, everything else of importance in Christianity follows.

2. The more frequent and open are the encroachments of infidelity, the more are you in danger of wishing to conceal a faith, which your in-

quiries have forced upon you, but of which you cannot be ashamed without the most alarming danger. You may be excellent men and good citizens, exemplary in your manners, and irreproachable in your conversation, and thus you will no doubt be respected; but not, my friends, in that character which you ought most of all to value, the character of a Christian. The world, not knowing upon what principles you act, will not ascribe your superiority to its true cause; nay, they will account for it in any way rather than refer it to a principle of religious faith. Hence the propriety and duty of an open profession of your christian faith. If you neglect this, Christianity will gain nothing by your example, and society will hardly be made wiser or better by your means. But where the faith of Jesus is professed as the source of all that is good in your character, you give to the Saviour that homage which his gospel deserves, 'and your light will shine before men, that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven.'

3. Remember that your superior knowledge and purer faith demand of you a purer practice, and a loftier sense of duty. The question 'What do ye more than others?' is the most unanswerable in the whole circle of unbelief. It will be to no purpose that you can defend the gospel in your reasonings, if you betray it in your lives. Men will look to you, and with perfect justice, for a holy and a devotional temper. They will expect to see you more indifferent to this world, and more

interested in another, than themselves. They will look for a disinterested spirit of benevolence, and a superiority which everywhere discovers that you are influenced by principles of more than earthly origin and energy.

Lastly, be not satisfied with having been once convinced of the truth of Christianity, but keep up your interest in it by constant and devout reading of the scriptures, and of such books as tend to interest you in their important truths. Let nothing divert you from the duty of prayer, for the sense of God's providence can in no other way be preserved in all its strength. Consider everything in life as subordinate to your religion. Surely if there is another life, everything must be subordinate, in the view of every sound mind. Let the children of this world give their whole attention to its perishing pleasures; for so they ought, according to their principles. But you, Christians, children of light! heirs of immortality! look beyond this transitory scene of things, to that inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away, the object not of sense, but of faith, reserved for you in heaven.

SERMON XI.

CONSISTENCY IN RELIGION.

MATTHEW, VI. 24.

NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS.

THIS is one of those aphorisms full of meaning, in which the discourses of our Saviour abound, and with which he introduces his caution to his disciples against anxiety about their present accommodation. He represents the service of the world and the service of God, as two opposite states, incompatible with each other, and as no man can at the same time obey the commands of two masters, each of whom has a claim on his time and labor, so neither can we serve God and the world, for it is impossible to maintain such a divided state of our affections. The claims of the two masters will be perpetually interfering and we must prefer the interests of one to those of the other.

The disciples must have felt the force of this illustration. The service of the gospel to which

they were, called was absolutely incompatible, not merely with that excessive solicitude about the conveniences of life, which is always a sin, but even with the common care of their families and estates. It was in fact saying to them, If you enlist yourselves in the service of the Messiah, you must give up all ideas of accumulating wealth, and, forsaking all care and anxiety, devote yourselves to this new employment. But this is not merely a lesson to the apostles. The word Mammon is the name of a Syrian idol, supposed to preside over riches, and to this specific meaning of the word our Saviour undoubtedly refers in our text, where the false deity Mammon, is opposed to the true God.

What then is the force of the aphorism in modern language? Is it not this, that no man must hope to divide his services between God and any other object of affection? that the service of the Supreme Being demands supreme affection, or in other words, religion, if it exists at all, must exist as a prevalent governing principle? The effect of this will be a consistent and uniform character, in which we may plainly perceive the influence of religious motives, and a principle of obedience to God.

The subject of our discourse from these words, 'no man can serve two masters,' is, the consistency of the religious character.

This subject, which is very plain in itself, is rendered difficult only by the perverse disposition of men to make this consistency of character sig-

nify the same thing with perfection. Hence they attempt to elude the reproach of inconsistency, by saying, 'We know that we are not perfect; perfection is not the lot of humanity.' This is very true, but it is nothing to the charge. We complain of an habitual inconsistency of character in men who profess to be men of religion; that they allow themselves in certain courses of life, and in uniform omissions of duty, which we maintain to be utterly incompatible with a prevailing sentiment of religious obedience. We perceive, in fact, that so far are they from earnestly striving after christian perfection, their hearts are yet divided, and they spend their lives in poor attempts at reconciling their convictions with their practice, their real pursuits with their acknowledged obligations, their sins with their better resolutions.

In other affairs we find no difficulty in understanding the difference between consistency and perfection of character. When a man, slavishly devoted to the acquisition of riches, is guilty of an action of gross imprudence or extravagance, we are astonished at his inconsistency, because he acts against his governing principles; but we consider it as no mitigation of the selfishness of his character. The very notion of christian perfection, as a point to which we must be continually tending, but which we are not to expect to reach, completely excludes us from offering it as an excuse for any of our miscarriages, because, if an excuse for any, it must be, from the very nature of

the thing, an excuse for all. The subject, then, which we have in view at present, is not the involuntary, or occasional defects of men who would be called religious, but their deliberate and habitual inconsistencies of conduct, which prove the absolute want of the religious principle, according to the maxim of our Saviour, that 'no man can serve two masters.'

We suppose ourselves to be now addressing those who retain in their hours of reflection, a belief more or less powerful, of the obligations of virtue and the truths of Christianity. They have not cast off all fear of God, and gone over deliberately to the party of unbelievers, but they are not decided whom they will serve. They would be shocked at the imputation of irreligion; yet they do not believe, or do not feel the inconsistency between their principles and their practice, and they have very inadequate conceptions, I do not say of the perfection, but of the uniformity and congruity of the christian character.

I. In the first place, it may be thought superfluous that we should rank in this class those inconsistent men, who would substitute a sound faith for a holy and virtuous life; for this is not the prevalent mistake of the age. It is supposed that the days have gone by, in which everything was thought lawful for the orthodox believer, and that God would see no sin in the faithful. It is true, that this is not the place, nor is it perhaps the period, in which this error prevails. Christians have

in general come to a better understanding of the language of scripture on the subject of faith, and it is universally acknowledged in words, if not in practice, that without personal holiness no man can see the Lord.

There is still, however, a remnant of this error to be seen among those who secretly maintain that no life of piety and virtue is of any avail to salvation, unless it is accompanied with certain peculiar views of the doctrines of Christianity, and that an apparently habitual conformity to the laws of God, is only a show of doubtful and rotten fruit, unless the tree has grown in a particular direction, and the roots have been fed from consecrated fountains. This kind of Christianity prevails much in some places ; but it is not confined to any particular sects. We find persons among ourselves, particularly at the close of life, who are more anxious to die sound believers, than real penitents. And there is hardly any place where a stress is not laid on some peculiarities of faith, which would be much better placed on some points of practice. But as this is not the danger into which you, my hearers, are most likely to fall, I will observe,

II. Secondly, on the opposite error of substituting morality for religion, and supplanting faith by an unenlightened exaltation of virtue. It is surprising, that any who profess to believe in the truth and importance of the christian revelation, should undervalue the influence of faith in the doctrines of the gospel, in the formation of char-

acter. Yet it is too plain that we are disposed to substitute amiable tempers in the place of virtue, and the regularity induced by habits of business, for religion. We need no stronger proof of this than the neglect which prevails, of impressing on the minds of children the great truths of religion, the fear of God and of a judgment to come, compared to the care which we manifest to establish them in life, and put them in a course of occupation, which shall save them from the temporal ruin attendant on profligacy. Yet how are we to secure the characters of our children, if, trusting to their amiable dispositions, we take no care to give them principles, and leaving them exposed to all the temptations of a corrupt world, we think it of no consequence how or when they get their religion, and imagine that if they stand well with society, they may do well enough without Christianity? This is an inconsistency, which in a christian parent is irreconcilable with his own persuasions, and with a religious character. It proves that his own faith is dead, that it is not the root and support of his integrity, that he feels not the worth of his religion, and of course that he lives not by it. Men have declaimed loudly against the evils of superstition, and the dangers of implicit faith. Let us be on our guard against the vain expectation that a character thoroughly virtuous, and faithful towards God and man, is to be supported by any consideration of present convenience, honor, and profit, without the aid of the motives of religion.

III. We discover other proofs of inconsistency in the reliance which is sometimes placed on the positive institutions of Christianity, as a species of compensation for not leading a life uniformly virtuous, or for indulging a temper not sanctified by the prevailing influence of religion. There is scarcely any Christian who will openly acknowledge that he indulges the hope of making a compensation for a negligent and dissipated course of life, by observing with punctuality the returns of the ordinance of the supper. Yet, if we mistake not, there are some, who feel little of the universal obligation to a holy life, who yet place much confidence in their distinction as communicants, and by their strict attention to these days, in preference to the other returns of public worship, intimate, that they look upon this ordinance, not merely as a duty and a privilege, but as something also of a security.

IV. But it may be thought that the opposite character, which we are now, in the fourth place, to describe, is much more common in our times. There is no doubt a prevailing disposition to represent the positive institutions of our religion, as a class of duties much below the obligations of morality.

And, let it be remembered, that by morality is commonly meant merely the social obligations which exist between men in society; mercy, beneficence, courteousness, and honorable conduct. If the duties of piety are taken into the account,

they are passed over with the remark, that they are affairs between God and a man's conscience, and that a good life is the best worship. This is very true; yet men are often much mistaken in the essential properties of a good character. It is, I fear, too often taken for granted that a serious attention to the duties and forms of religion, throws a suspicion on the other parts of a good character, and that there must be a little hypocrisy where there is much appearance of religion. It may be left to the serious and candid judgment of every thinking man, whether a faithful observance of the forms of religion and the ordinances of Christianity, is not more usually connected with a virtuous and upright conduct in the affairs of common life, than with the opposite character. How unfair is it then, to put in a claim to respect, and confidence, and honor from the world, because you profess to undervalue the ordinances of religion, and to say in fact to the religious man, Stand by, thou mayst be holier, but I am better than thou! But is not this strange inversion of spiritual pride sometimes to be discerned in men, who set at nought the forms of religion? If, my hearers, we cannot serve two masters, but must either love the one and hate the other, or hold to the one and despise the other, whom must those be said to serve who devote days and weeks and years to the business and pleasures of the world; who, in the pursuit of gain and the varieties of endless dissipation, are never weary, never reluctant, never

prepared with an excuse, whilst they grudge every hour which they devote to the exercises of religion; and this too with the plea, that God looks not at the outward appearance, but at the heart, that he will have morals, not ceremonies, mercy, and not sacrifice? Gracious God! to whom do they sacrifice? Nay, where do they sacrifice? They think, indeed, with truth, that worship is not more acceptable to God on one day than on another. But would he, who is disposed to worship God at all, think that he could possibly serve the cause of real religion in opposition to superstition, by his neglect of the most favorable opportunity for it, which this day always affords? It is true there is a perpetual tendency in men to rest in the means of religion rather than to keep in view the end; but neither virtue, piety, happiness, security, nor anything valuable to man, can be promoted by attempting to secure the end, without the means. 'My son, give me thy heart,' is the tender invitation of our Father in heaven. But has he given his heart, who excuses himself from the rational services of religion by pretences which he would not dare to offer in the common business of life, and for reasons which never detain him from his pleasures, and would have no force with him in any case where his ruling passion was engaged?

In the last place, we observe the inconsistency which we have been condemning, in that partial obedience we are contented to pay to the com-

mands of God, and in the various compensations and comparisons we make between one duty or disposition and another, both in our estimate of our own characters, and the characters of others. Thus, the avaricious and hard-hearted comfort themselves with the consciousness of their honesty, and with the plea that they are never guilty of extravagance, improvidence, luxury, or dissipation. The man of pleasure boasts of his charities, his frankness, his freedom from sordid and narrow-minded vices; and not only so, he looks with contempt on his frugal and regular neighbour. The man who has amassed a great estate by fraudulent means, will attempt to make an atonement for his former life by some occasional acts of pious munificence. In some circles beneficence has the preference; in others, commercial integrity; in others, fidelity in friendship; in others, religious zeal. We select from the universal obligations of morality, those in which we think ourselves least deficient, and look with complacency through the glass which is colored with our favorite hue.

This character of inconsistency, is totally distinct from that of the weak and imperfect Christian, whose strong passions occasionally surprise him into acts of which he repents, or who is sensible of the imperfection of his best services, notwithstanding his daily endeavours after improvement.

My friends, it becomes us most seriously to remember that the habitual and deliberate neglect

of a single commandment, implies a disposition of revolt, of rebellion, and of resistance, totally inconsistent with a religious character. It implies that all our pretences of reverence for our Maker are hollow and dissembling; it implies that we practise upon ourselves delusions the most gross, when we imagine that the observance of one law, will atone for the violation of another; that a man may be charitable without being just, or just without being charitable; honorable without being pious, or pious without being honorable; sober without being chaste, punctilious without being exact, or generous without prudence and choice; zealous without being candid, or candid because indifferent and careless; ceremoniously exact without being pure within, or so pure within as to despise any aid from without.

When a sincere principle of universal obedience is wanting, the defect will infallibly be seen in some portion of the character, or some period of the life. In the goodly superstructure of such a man's morals there will be found some flaw, which betrays the insecurity of the foundation. There is nothing which renders a man's real virtue more suspicious, than to find him professing to be immaculate in those portions of his character where he has no temptation to transgress. You have no right to thank God that you are not as other men, because, while your neighbour is intemperate, you have no temptation to become drunkards; while your superiors are proud, you are only envious of

their high station; while your friend's family is extravagant, yours is only churlish; while your vicinity is full of dissipation, your own household is employed in calumniating their characters and conduct. Hence, however extravagant the assertion may appear, we may admit, in its most literal meaning, the declaration of the apostle, 'that he who offends in one point, is guilty of all.' The presumption is, that all your show of virtue is only a disguised, but perpetual violation of the only true principle of christian virtue, obedience to the will of God.

When you appear therefore to reform and only change your forms of disobedience, all that can be admitted in your favor, is, that you have not been, through the whole course of your life, the regular slave of any inveterate habit. In your abundance, you have not been guilty of the low frauds of indigence, and in your poverty you have not discovered the haughtiness of security. In adversity you have not abandoned yourself to presumptuousness; in prosperity you have not murmured and repined. In youth you have not exhibited the faults of age, and in age you have not retained the follies of youth. Wonderful proficiency in the spirit of a Christian!

My friends, it is impossible for any man who has a proper sense of the consistency and uniformity of the religious character, to allow himself in such comparisons. He hopes that God, who knows his temptations and trials, will make a gracious allow-

ance for his peculiar defects; but as for himself, he makes no allowance. He struggles most against the sins to which he is most exposed; sensible, 'that whosoever offendeth in one point is guilty of all,' and that he is not a real Christian, who allows himself deliberately in any course of omission or commission, which he has reason to think God's will requires.

Of the same kind are those inconsistencies which we see in men, who substitute a temporary for a regular obedience. Some men have seasons of tenderness and compunction. They make resolutions, the effect of which lasts through a period either of affliction, anxiety, or bereavement, but they relapse into their former courses, and attempt to derive merit from their temporary reformation. There are others, who are afraid of great sins, and behave well in any very important crisis of life, whose habitual temper is unamiable and unchristian. Most men can do right when the eyes of the world are invited to observe them. They then decide nobly, righteously, and generously; but would you know whether they have the spirit and power of religion, follow them to their families, to the minute and trivial concerns of life, and then you may learn best their true worth and their real defects.

But this subject is extremely copious and I must forbear any further remarks.

My hearers, I have thus endeavoured, from the solemn words of our Saviour, 'no man can serve

two masters,' to give you some idea of the consistency and uniformity of the christian character, and to correct that common evasion, with which we so often delude ourselves, that perfection is not the lot of humanity. Perfection and consistency are two different attainments. The former is the point to which we must be continually aiming, the other is that which we must have reached, before we can lay claim to the character of real Christians. The distinction is sufficiently obvious. The perfect Christian is one who never sins; the consistent Christian is one who allows himself in no sin, but being governed supremely by the principles of his religion, grows in grace and knowledge, and by a diligent use of the means of religion, advances steadily in the divine life.

My hearers, we have a great work before us, and a day of trial and retribution awaits us. He who is seriously engaged in this great work, cannot hope to be received and accepted by his God, unless he has given him his heart. 'No man can serve two masters; choose you then this day whom you will serve.' For behold the time is coming when he who deserves all we can give him of affection and obedience, will appear as our judge. Then many will come, saying, Lord, have we not passed through life with reputable characters? We have not outraged thine authority, nor failed to respect the forms of thy religion. Then will he say unto them, Ye have had no faith in my

name, no fear of God before your eyes, but ye have loved the praise of men more than the praise of God; verily I say unto you, ye have had your reward.

Then will others come, saying, Lord, thou desirest not sacrifice, else would we give it; we have not paid the tithe of mint, anise, and cummin; but we have observed the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and fidelity. Then will the Judge answer and say unto them, These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone. Ye have said, 'What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?' I know you that ye have not the love of God in you.

Then others will come saying, Lord, behold our charities. When I saw the hungry, I fed them; the sick, and in prison, I visited them; I have abstained from all appearance of evil. Behold my frequent resolutions, my public sacrifices, my zeal for thy cause; my care of my family; my humility, poverty, or my reputation and my friends. Then will the King answer and say to one, I know thy works, thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. To another, Pure religion before God the Father, is not only to visit the fatherless and widows, but to keep thyself unspotted from the world. To another, What shall I do unto thee, for thy goodness is as the morning cloud and the evening dew, which soon passeth away. To another,

To whom much has been given, of him much will be required.

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?

SERMON XII.

THE INADEQUACY OF THE PREVAILING CONCEPTIONS AS TO THE EXTENT OF THE DIVINE LAW, COMPARED WITH THE MORALITY OF THE GOSPEL.

PSALMS, CXIX. 96.

THY COMMANDMENT IS EXCEEDING BROAD.

I HAVE seen, says the Psalmist, an end of all perfection; the glory of human greatness vanishes; the objects of human pursuit disappoint us; the wonders of nature and art decay; and what we call moral perfection, as it is exhibited in human character, is either frail, defective, or delusive; but thy commandment, O God, is exceeding broad.

The opposition between the two parallel portions of the verse may not at first be understood. The meaning undoubtedly is, of that which is perfect in human estimation we soon find a limit, but the wisdom and perfection of thy law, who can represent? This comprehensive law of goodness, which appeared to the Psalmist so exceeding broad, is more clearly defined and illustrated in the New Testament; and if there were nothing else to prove the divine origin of Christ's religion, the

very nature of his moral precepts would perhaps be sufficient. Of the evangelical morality it may be truly said, that it cannot be improved. The world had before known nothing like it, as a whole, and it would be perhaps impossible to collect all its precepts, even if we were permitted to search, and select here and there a maxim or a sentiment from all the works of the ancients. It is distinguished for the grandeur and efficacy of its sanctions, which lay hold on eternity to come ; for the restraints which it lays on the heart, the source of action, and for its elevating, purifying, and spiritualizing influence. In short, the instructions of Christ partake of the divinity of their author ; the spirit, which descended like a dove, and rested upon him, breathes in every line which he has left us.

When we consider the vast extent of the christian morality, and compare it with the inadequate conceptions of duty entertained by many Christians, it may be well thought surprising that we should have discovered so much more solicitude to erect standards of faith, than standards of practice. We have guarded the articles of our belief against invasion or evasion, by every possible barrier, and have considered the church in danger when the perfection of these formularies has been doubted or denied. But no church has thought it equally necessary to take care of its system of duties. Diversity of sentiment on the subject of practice, has been thought a less dangerous heresy,

and a church cannot be shown in ecclesiastical history, which has established a creed in morals.

Whence this strange inconsistency in our zeal? Is it because the intentions of scripture are more plain on this subject than on articles of faith? Or is it because our love of power is more flattered by subjecting other men to the standard of our speculations, than by guarding them from mistaking their duty?

Whatever answer may be given to these questions, I think no man, who makes the scriptures his study, need be more surprised or concerned at the variety of doctrines which men have attempted to draw from them, than at the imperfect notions which still exist on the subject of duty. The cause of this diversity is to be sought, not in the obscurity of our Saviour's precepts, for in general their spirit cannot be mistaken, but in our ignorance of ourselves, in our slavish subjection to custom and fashion, in our thoughtless lives, and above all, in the great reluctance which every man feels to suffer the standard of duty to be raised much higher than the point to which he has himself attained.

I shall devote this discourse to an inquiry into the inadequate conceptions which prevail as to the extent of the divine law. The subject naturally divides itself into the four grand points of justice, benevolence, purity, and piety. We shall consider the prevailng defects of our moral sentiments on each of these branches of the christian law.

I. Upon the subject then of justice, upon which, if on any branch of morals, we may suppose men to entertain accurate ideas, because it is intimately connected with all their business, and with all their labors, it will be found that few of us have either very exact, comprehensive, or evangelical conceptions.

It is a general sentiment in society, that if a man of business observes a common honesty in his negotiations; if he is true to his word, faithful in his engagements, and punctual in his appointments, it is not only as much as we, but as God has a right to expect. Instances of deliberate, high-handed fraud, excite, it is true, a temporary indignation; but the awakened sensibility too soon subsides; the knowledge of successful dishonesty seems rather to prepare us better for the next example; and often is the most deliberate injustice covered over at last by forms and the show of precedent, and men consent to enjoy all their lives the fruits of the very wickedness they have execrated.

But after all, my friends, is the bare observance of the laws, in commercial transactions, the extent of the christian duty of justice? There is a sense of equity in a man of christian principles, which mere law cannot prescribe, and to which custom does not always reach. There is a sense of right, which can neither be inspired nor supported by a common regard to reputation; and a high sense of duty, which asks only the eye of God for its witness and reward.

What do we think, also, of the great duty of restitution, in innumerable cases which the laws and customs of society hardly contemplate? If we have either designedly or undesignedly wronged our brother, it is our duty to make him compensation, even in cases where he is ignorant of his loss, in others where he does not demand it, in many where he cannot require it by any positive compact, and in many more where there is no common tribunal to which we may appeal, to decide the proper measure of retribution.

There are some cases of inquiry known only to God and ourselves; there are others, where the world would smile at us if we felt bound to redress them. There are cases in which, though we are entirely guiltless in the sight of God, yet we may become guilty by withholding that compensation, which nothing but a tender conscience, or if you choose to call it so, a delicate sense of honor, knows how to estimate.

Again; are there not some who venture to propagate, or, at least, not to contradict a false report, by which, for the sake of gain, they may practise on the credulity of the public? Are there not those who will encounter risks, undertake adventures, and hazard speculations, to which their means are entirely inadequate? and this, too, with the prospect before them, not merely of their own ruin, but of the ruin of others, to whose kindness they have been indebted, and whose interests they have no right to endanger?

But there is another more extensive branch of justice upon which there prevails an astonishing insensibility in the minds even of honest men. I mean justice to the reputation of others. We enjoy the benefits of society only on condition of preserving its rights, and in every civilized country justice is due to every man's character, whether we are his friend or his enemy. We are not only to render tribute to whom tribute, but honor to whom honor is due. Every man has a right to our good opinion, till he has forfeited it. Every man has a right to have his character as inviolate as his property, even when he cannot protect it by positive laws. Whatever be the principles which he is supposed to entertain, the amount of his importance in society, or the relation in which he stands to ourselves, he has a demand of justice to his character from every individual in the community. I speak not now of charity, but of justice. He has a right to expect that no doubtful or malicious insinuations should obtain that currency which is often given them in inconsiderate conversation. For, not only are we injurious by the direct propagation of unjust reports, but we have not even a right to give them countenance in our more private and confidential intercourse. Nay, more; the sufferer, whatever be his rank or consequence, has a right to demand of us that we do him not the injustice to be predisposed to believe them. We see then that this extensive law of justice, has a bearing on the estimates which we

secretly form of the characters of others. We are really unjust, when we suffer any unfounded prejudice to obscure our sense of another's merits. We are unjust, when we conceal the good qualities of an enemy or a rival; or when we labor to put an unfavorable construction on his apparent excellences. In this view of the extensive justice which we owe to each other, how are our daily offences multiplied! How often do cruel calumnies circulate among us, wasting the reputation of men, when they are entirely ignorant, and entirely undeserving of their loss! How often do we refuse men the least share in our estimation, for no other reason than because they do not belong to our circle, or follow in our train! How careless are we of retrieving the mischiefs we have done to others by our inconsideration, and how slow are we to remove the false impressions which we have undesignedly given!

Again; it should not be forgotten that gratitude is also a part of justice, and that we should be as scrupulous of rendering kindness for kindness, as of discharging our just debts or of securing our lawful dues. On the other hand, do I exaggerate the state of opinion when I say, that our notions of the extent of the divine law are so defective, that we are ready to think that fraud will authorise fraud, deception merit deception, and neglect give room for neglect and calumny? We have only to turn our thoughts upon our own consciences to find how inadequate is our sense of

justice, and how narrow the common definitions of honesty. Thy commandment, O God, is exceeding broad; thy justice reacheth unto the clouds.

II. The second great article of morals, upon which our conceptions are much more imperfect than they ought to be, is the duty of benevolence. This is a branch of duty more easy to praise than to practise; and not only so, it is a portion of character, in which we are most sensible to the defects of others, and most exorbitant in our demands upon those who have it in their power to be more beneficent, than ourselves. And yet, notwithstanding all this sensibility upon the subject of benevolence, though it is the topic of universal praises, the virtue upon which men who have no other, are most disposed to descant; and though it is no less the subject of our Saviour's instructions, than of the popular philosophy, perhaps we shall be found upon examination, to entertain very inadequate ideas of its real obligations.

The commandment of doing to others as we would have them do to us, is exceeding broad. Let us compare it, not with the practice of mankind, but with the prevailing maxims, which we frequently hear in society. Thus he may pass for a benevolent man, who relieves the poor when they importune him, who contributes his share to a popular subscription, who takes care of his destitute relations, and provides perhaps for some who have no claims upon his kindness, except the

common rights of humanity in distress. It is a common observation with those, who would be shocked to be thought deficient in benevolence, 'that charity begins at home.' True, it does; but there it never terminates. It is the quality of true benevolence to expand itself constantly, and when it is contracted by necessity into a smaller circle, it suffers a compression, which gives the spirit of doing good a greater vigor.

The great defect in our conceptions of benevolence, is, that we confine it too much to the duty of alms-giving, or pecuniary bounty. Bounty to the poor will neither atone for the iniquitous acquisition of wealth, nor excuse us from the necessity of cultivating an habitual disposition of benevolence. Occasional or long continued attention to particular persons, will not atone for a constant churlishness of temper to others, nor will it compensate for a hard, unyielding character in business, or for an habitual selfishness and cool neglect of others' accommodation.

The notions which the apostles entertained of this virtue, we find in the address of Peter to the man at the porch of the temple, before he healed him. 'Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I unto thee.' There is hardly anything which in some cases more clearly evinces a defect of benevolence, than the giving of money, when it is done to silence importunity, or to excuse us from the trouble of ascertaining the real wants of the distressed and the best mode of relieving them.

We see in the life of our blessed Lord, who had no earthly possessions, the spirit of doing good, in all its activity and extent. You, who have so much in your power to do, have you ever thought of this bright example of generosity without almsgiving, relief without money, effectual benevolence without influence, character, or reputation, and can you think that the christian law of benevolence is completely answered by the giving of alms? If I may be permitted to inquire into your practical persuasions upon this subject, I would ask you, in the first place, is beneficence truly agreeable to you? Is it your meat and your drink to cooperate with your Father in heaven in the grand object of human happiness? Are not your benefactions sometimes extorted from you through fear of shame, or are you often grieved that you cannot do more? Are you satisfied from year to year with a particular measure of doing good, though your means in the mean time may have prodigiously increased, and your power of serving mankind have evidently extended?

Again; have you a practical persuasion of your duty to others as a man of influence, knowledge, power, and notoriety, as well as wealth? Do you consider how much you ought to surrender of your personal accommodation to the welfare of others? that many, whom your bounty would not profit, your knowledge may assist, your advice may save, your encouragement may stimulate, your patronage may establish, your praises may inspire,

your example may incalculably serve? Have you considered that it is a duty of benevolence, not merely to lend your good offices when they are solicited, but to anticipate applications, to meet the advances of the timid, to inquire into the circumstances of the distressed, and to rejoice as much in any newly discovered opportunity of doing good as in a new acquisition? Have you considered that he who is not active in his benevolence, who imparts only what is obtained from him by direct application, is of all men the most prejudicial to the growth of a spirit of benevolence, because he gains the character of a benevolent man, without imparting any of the spirit of that blessed quality? Such a man gives no life to the generosity of the community; he does no more good than the precise amount of his benefaction produces.

Again; the great law of christian benevolence includes every object within its reach, enemies, not less than friends, the distant as well as the near; strangers as well as familiar acquaintance. It does not suffer us to give them up, when many are willing to retire and be forgotten. Christian benevolence forbids our adopting the common profession. Though such an one is my enemy, I would relieve him from distress if he came in my way, but it requires every man to seek for reconciliation where he has any hope of obtaining it; to rejoice in all the happiness which he sees innocently enjoyed by his enemies; to contribute his share to the comfort and good humor of society,

even when his vanity is sometimes mortified, and his feelings wounded. In short, it is every man's duty to consider how much more is necessary to benevolence than mere bounty or compassion, and that the good will which will make no sacrifice, is little more than a reputable selfishness.

Finally, my friends, is that a genuine spirit of benevolence which does not extend itself to the source of all the misery in the world, and evinces no interest in the moral condition and everlasting welfare of others? Does the law of christian benevolence allow us to be satisfied with relieving misery, when we take no pains to prevent vice? Has he any claim to the character of a man of real benevolence, who encourages, by his example or his neglect, that depravity in the community which terminates at last in the very distress which he is prompt to relieve? Can any sympathy with affliction, any nobleness of temper, any boasted instances of generosity, any instinct of kindness, atone for an indifference to the moral and religious character of those with whom we are connected, or for habits of vice, which destroy all that is valuable in human life? Talk not, then, my friends, of benevolence without principle, of compassion which has no object but that of relieving visible distress, of a generous temper, which has no feeling for the depravity and crimes of mankind. That is not benevolence, which will make no sacrifices for the general good. The benevolence of the gospel is active as well as passive, comprehensive, pure, peaceful, and gentle.

III. The next branch of christian virtue which we shall consider, is the great law of purity; not because we imagine it to be that which is most frequently transgressed, but because it is one which is very seldom treated with the seriousness it deserves. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is, not only to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, but to keep one's self unspotted from the world. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

From these expressions you cannot fail to understand, that purity does not consist merely in laying a restraint here and there, where we are most exposed, nor in avoiding some disreputable spots of character; but purity of heart is that white robe which envelopes all the virtues of the character, a robe so white and delicate that it may be stained no less easily from within than from without.

But before we consider the extent of this law of purity, let us express our grief and astonishment, that any should be found in a christian community, and professing to regard the gospel as their rule of morals, who yet, in making up their judgment, or in regulating their treatment of others, hardly take the consideration of purity into their estimate of character. With all our professions of Christianity, we have yet chosen, against the very spirit and letter of God's laws, to make an unauthorised distinction between sins, which may be practised with and without the loss of reputation.

Are there not sins, which, if God is true, will cast a man away from his presence, which yet are far from shutting him out of the esteem of man?

Of that infinite variety of characters of which society is composed, one of the most common is that of the man who allows himself in a single favorite vice. He finds that there are sins which he may practise with security in secret, and that even if they are known within his favorite circle, he loses nothing of his good estimation. There, if indeed any excuse is expected of him, he does not deny his constitutional infirmity; to the better part of society he is willing to atone for it in some other way. To himself he pleads the force of temptation, or even of habit; yet he will take care to be as inoffensive, and always as honorable as possible in his indulgences. Perhaps he even ventures to think that he does no injury to society, that his character, on the whole, is not materially defective. Does he ever think of God? Perhaps, even God will not be strict in condemning me!

On the whole, he is entirely persuaded that he is not worse than the majority; nay, he is inclined to believe that, with this single exception, as he dares to regard it, he is a better man than his more conscientious neighbour, who, without any visible criminality, is certainly not so amiable, nor so generous, nor so honorable as himself. Men of this character are sometimes capable of acts of great generosity, resorting to beneficence as a species of equivalent for a strictly pure and vir-

tuous life; as if they could indulge a favorite sin, at the price of practising a virtue, which in its common acceptation is the least difficult and the most popular of all the virtues.

In the character we have now drawn, we find the danger of taking our estimate of any from the maxims of the world. To men of this description what is that language of the gospel, which we presume they are not yet hardy enough to disdain? What is the language of that strict reason, which, if they hear not from their consciences, they must hear at last from their Judge? 'He that keeps the whole law, and yet offends in one point, is guilty of all.' He has no true principle of virtue, no sincere obedience to the will of God. His fair show of popular qualities is a show of rotten fruit. In the sight of God he is radically corrupt. He is criminal, he is in the path to ruin, though, in his own estimation, he has narrowed it to a single sin. He is surely working out his own destruction, though singly, secretly, and honorably. The world kindly calls him his own enemy; he is not only his own enemy, he is man's, he is God's; because he is attempting a union of irreconcilable qualities, of virtues and vices which the day of retribution will show him that even God's omnipotence cannot reconcile.

My christian hearers, remember this. The man who, in the language of the world, has only one vice but many virtues, has, in religious strictness, no virtues at all. Do not misunderstand. The

man who deliberately allows himself in any sin which God, and reason, and Christianity disallow, has in fact no true and sincere principles. He may possess some amiable dispositions, but really he has no morals. However the thoughtless or the irreligious world may excuse or flatter him, as a man of an excellent heart, because, instead of being guilty of theft or fraud or some other unpopular crime, he only happens to be the slave of a more fashionable vice; in the sight of God, these distinctions are neither made nor admitted; and would to God, they were never admitted in society!

If we proceed to inquire into the notions of purity, which are entertained by men who do not allow themselves in habitual transgressions of positive laws, I fear we shall find much indistinctness. It is impossible to avoid this conclusion, where we observe, as we sometimes may, that the tongue will take a license denied to the actions. Let us follow out our train of thoughts, and we shall often find them traversing ground which is dangerrous or corrupting. There is no sin in this, if these thoughts are not encouraged, if they are banished and never recalled. But is it true, that any great compunction ever follows these wanderings of the fancy, which are often the beginnings of irretrievable disorder? What notions can they have of the obligations of purity, who will expose themselves to temptations, because they can easily resist them? What notions of purity can they

have, who will not only drink in themselves, but proffer to others, the poison of licentious thoughts, and think that all is well? From this low sense of purity, which satisfies the world, we turn to the gospel of Christ, that we may breathe a purer air.

Now, in the view of Jesus, the opposite of purity is every species of internal defilement. In his gospel, we learn that out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. There we find that the seat of impurity is in the affections, and till these are purified, the inner chambers of the mind remain the scene of vices of which the world knows nothing. There we learn, that the same control of the actions is not only insufficient, but that it has been always unsuccessful. There, too, we understand that the principal design of our Saviour's exhortations on the subject of purity, is, to direct our attention to the thoughts, in contradistinction to the actions, which are external. It is only when we think of this, that we can understand the full force of such injunctions as these; 'Purify yourselves from all corruptions of the flesh and spirit; even as Christ our Lord is pure;' 'Crucify the old man, and put on the new man, in righteousness and true holiness, and your hearts shall be the temple of the Holy Spirit.' We can understand by these expressions, however metaphorical, nothing less than this, that the heart must be divested of all those inclinations, which, whether they break out into action or not, are inconsistent

with that purity, of which our Saviour has left us an example, and to preserve which we are solemnly enjoined.

Among the innumerable proofs of the divinity of everything relating to Jesus and Christianity, the stress laid upon the regulation of the thoughts, is admirable and peculiar. With our Saviour, and with him only, thought is everything. He knew what was in man; and he does not merely recommend this restraint, or propose it as a greater degree of perfection, but he declares it in the very first instance essential. Therefore, keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

IV. The fourth division now remains, in which we proposed to examine some of the prevailing notions with regard to piety, not with a view of showing the want of it in the world, but of correcting the notions which are entertained of this branch of christian duty.

By piety is here meant, not the whole of a christian character, sometimes expressed by the word godliness, but that branch of duty which has God more immediately for its object. It is, undoubtedly, not only a duty, but of all duty the most valuable part. For that disposition towards God, which leads to the performance of all other duties, is not only necessary to the perfection, but even to the existence of steadfast virtue and christian morality.

There are those who have no reference in their conduct to God's will, no affections of which God is the object. No man can doubt this, who considers that among the higher classes, the law of honor has in many cases superseded the law of God; and there are thousands, who, when they think at all of the moral character of their actions, ask no other question than, How will this appear, what will be thought of it? A great portion of those in humble life, derive their moral ideas from the law of the land; and with them, that is right which does not expose them to punishment. There is however another class of refined and delicate spirits of great sensibility, who seem to have a love of virtue, enough at least to furnish out a declamation, whose notion of it seems at last to resolve itself into a refined sentiment or taste; and there is a still more numerous and reflecting class of those who reduce all their duty into present utility, and attempt to build up a system of morals, unconnected with religion, and without reference to the will of God.

But we must be more particular. In the first place, it cannot fail to have been remarked by you, that there are many very reputable and honest men, who do not consider the duties of piety as essential parts of a good character. Now, if we admit that there is a God who made us and supports us, and if we admit, too, that man is capable of knowing, serving, and loving this God, it must appear to every man who thinks,

that he must be a monster, who has no sentiments of piety. You cannot but acknowledge, that where the greatest excellence exists, the highest veneration is due; and that to him to whom we are most obliged, and on whom we are most dependent, we owe the highest gratitude and reverence. We are moral and rational creatures; and constituted as we are, what can be proved to be a duty, if this cannot, that we should cultivate the best affections towards God, reverencing him as the greatest, submitting to him as the wisest, loving and imitating him as the best of beings? But this is piety. And yet there are men, who consider piety as not essential to a good character. Suppose we should choose to say that love and obedience to parents were no part of morals, and that a man might be a very good man, who neglected and disobeyed the authors of his existence. Now this would be an inconsiderable error compared with the other, inasmuch as God is everything to us, and all our other obligations are united and combined in our duty to him. We object not to morality. Would to God there were more, and higher, and purer, and better. But we know of no morality among rational men, among Christians, that is not built upon the sense of duty to God. We may talk of utility, of prudence, of pleasure, of honesty, and beneficence; but without piety, the soul, the life of virtue is absent, and in the day of trial this fair and splendid structure will fail. When the rains and the floods descend, and beat on this

building it will fall, for it is founded upon the sand.

In the second place, it seems to be a common opinion, that piety is a quality to be found only in particular constitutions, a disposition dispensed to some and denied to others, one of those diversities in taste and temper, which makes a variety indeed in life, but that some men are not gifted with it, and it is not to be expected of them.

Will you acknowledge then that piety is unnatural to you? Do you know that piety means an affection of the mind to the greatest and worthiest Being in nature; a grateful feeling towards the best friend, a trust in his wise and kind protection, a confidence in his paternal government, a submission to his will, a desire of his esteem, and a humble expectation of happiness from his favor? Do you know God, and are you ready to say that your minds are so formed, that you have no veneration or love for such a character? Will you plead that piety is unnatural to you? God will not admit of this plea. God, who knows that he has laid in the constitution of human nature a foundation for all those affections of the soul which constitute piety, will not admit of this extenuation.

This mistake, no doubt, arises in some degree from our judging of the nature of true piety from the form which it takes in particular tempers. All good affections are different in different minds. For example, the friendship of some men is strong and quiet, of others ardent. The humanity of

some is melting and tender, of others active and constant but calm. So it is with piety. The only thing of consequence, is, that it be sincere, real, habitual, possessing the heart, keeping God in view in all the interests of our lives, and doing everything with reference to him. The man who is willing to admit that he has no dispositions of this kind towards God, virtually admits that he has no good dispositions. He would be ashamed to say, that he was incapable of entering into the affections and practising the duties of a good subject, friend, or son. If, then, he is willing to admit that he has no disposition to piety, he in fact excites the suspicion, and justly too, that he is pursuing some indulgences, and the slave of some affections, which are at enmity with God, and with which he is afraid to present himself before God. The language of his heart is, 'Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways.' This, then, is a mistake which deserves our most serious consideration.

There exists, however, a third proof of the deficiency of our notions on the subject of piety, and this is, the sentiment so often professed even by good and exemplary men, that they attend upon the public worship of God for the sake of setting an example. Be not surprised or offended that this language is adduced as a proof of the incompetency of our religious notions. Let this consideration of example have all the weight which it deserves; but in the name of God, whom we pro-

fess to worship on this spot, let it not usurp the place of those affections towards him, which constitute true religion. Whenever our acts of devotion, or any other duties of piety, are observed merely for the sake of example, the ground of action is unsubstantial. If there is no reason for a duty, beside the example, there is in truth no reason for it at all. This language would lead to this most absurd conclusion, that if every one were entirely disposed to do his duty, and had no need of encouragement from the example of others, there would be no reason left for any duty; in other words, we should have no duties to perform.

In truth, if example were the only reason for the duties of piety, or for religious services, what support have they? None. Our conclusion from this reasoning then is, not that it is unlawful to admit this consideration, but that it is dangerous and wicked to allow that, which is only secondary and consequential, to shut out from our thoughts the true foundation of piety towards God. If this is the only motive for the observance of religious services, their religious quality has disappeared, their very life has vanished. Let us not say that we come here to pray. We do not; we come here for the sake of the example! Proud man! idle spectator of this scene! you vouchsafe your presence in these assemblies for the benefit of others, for the edification of the people. Have you then no sins to deplore, no mercies to acknowledge, no pardon to entreat?

Piety, my christian hearers, can spring from nothing but itself, its own sentiment and principle, the sentiment of gratitude, reverence, and love towards God, the principle of obedience to his will, as the foundation of all christian virtue and true morality. Our acts of piety are altogether defective, in motive and in practice, when we do not consider our own interests involved in them, when we do not feel them to be our own particular duty.

Have we duly thought of this subject? Is private and public devotion really a duty, which every rational creature owes to God, or is it only a habit which has grown up we know not how, from a time we know not when? Do we bear in mind, that no religious services can be effectual, either with God or with ourselves, in which the affections are not engaged? If we never experience that warm and virtuous energy which devotion inspires, the consolation it imparts, and the sympathy which social worship ought to awaken, we do not worship in spirit and in truth. If these are our sentiments and feelings, our piety will be an example to others, and yet our own. It will be public and yet personal. It will be what Christ would have it, when he said, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.' The glory of God is the termination of the precept; and if we keep this in view, our example will have all the value which sincerity and piety can give it.

My christian hearers, let us not forget that our character is utterly defective and incomplete without piety. The distinguishing service which Christianity has done for the world, is to bring us to the knowledge, love, and imitation of the true God. We talk indeed of the morality of the New Testament, we commend its virtuous precepts. But if we search the records of the heathen world, we shall find many great and good men, who have made extraordinary advances in all that is virtuous; in justice, temperance, and beneficence; but the best and wisest of them made no approaches towards the piety of the gospel. Let us not forget, then, that as far as we are deficient in this blessed temper of devotion, so far do we fall short of the spirit of Christianity, the glory and distinction of a Christian.

If there was ever a person on earth, who, in consequence of the perfection of every other virtue, might plead an exemption from this of piety, it was Jesus Christ. But in him this principle was the very origin and substance of all his excellences. Every movement of his heart, every act of his life, was to please God. It was this which gave purity, fortitude, cheerfulness, consistency to everything in his character. He honored and worshipped his heavenly Father. He loved him, and delighted to hold constant communion with the Father of his spirit. If, then, we possessed this principle, how easy and delightful would be our duty! We should, from a principle of grati-

tude, observe the ordinances of the gospel, and find happiness in all the exercises of a holy and merciful religion. God would be in all our thoughts, and whatsoever we did, we should do all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON XIII.

THE COMMON MISTAKES ON THE SUBJECT OF HAPPINESS AND ITS TRUE SOURCES.

PSALM IV. 6.

THERE BE MANY THAT SAY, WHO WILL SHOW US ANY GOOD?

IT is a melancholy consideration that this has been the common inquiry of men ever since the world was made, and that so few of them seem to have attained to anything like permanent happiness. How few are there in the world, who, if you ask them the plain and simple question, Are you happy? would answer spontaneously, that they were. How busy are men in the pursuit of this common good! How numerous and opposite are the courses which they take! How frequent and miserable are the countenances of the discontented! Philosophers have been speculating in all ages upon the supreme good, men have been making every imaginable variety of experiment, teachers have given innumerable lessons upon this most difficult yet most simple of arts; in fine, God has more than once interposed to assist us in our pro-

gress, and offers us every encouragement to the attainment of this great end, and yet how unsatisfied are we, how grossly have we been disappointed in the past, how painfully solicitous are we for the future!

It shall be my present object to inquire, why there is not more happiness among mankind, and in order to this, I shall endeavour to lay open some of the most common mistakes upon the subject.

I. 1. The first mistake, which is too common, especially among those who have experienced many trials and difficulties in life, is, that happiness is to be found in rest. Ask those who are so busy in the active pursuits of life, to what they look forward with such ardent expectations, and they will tell you that they are toiling for repose. They look with envy upon the condition of that man, who, in the language of the world, has nothing to do but enjoy himself. They look upon exertion as a species of servitude, as if he were the only independent man, who was reposing upon his laurels or his gains. But, as has been pointedly observed, that man is most restless, who is most at rest. Nothing is so hard as the pillow of perpetual indolence; nothing so oppressive as the stagnant, inelastic air of entire inactivity. The truth is, that the mind which is not constantly directed to something exterior, preys upon itself. The bed-ridden intellect pines away in atrophy and the everlasting uneasiness of sloth. Most of those who have nothing to do, commonly do nothing, or do

wrong, and it is necessary to have advanced much further than most of us have in the work of our intellectual perfection, to be able to relinquish without great misery the career of active exertion.

2. A second mistake upon the subject of happiness, is, that it is to be found in prosperity. The truth is, that of the objects of human acquisition, very few are beyond a certain limit even the means of happiness. We are perpetually making this mistake in respect to riches, and confounding two things completely distinct; that is, property and happiness. Ask those, I pray you, who have accumulated the most enormous fortunes, whether they have ever yet been able to increase their possessions faster than their wants. It is indeed a trite maxim, that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses, yet common as it is, it would seem as if it were a doubtful truth which remains to be established. For, when we look at those above us, and find that they are able to supply those wants to which we, in our actual situation, are most sensible, it is natural to conclude that they are happy, because we should be happy if we could remove, as they can, our most pressing needs. We do not consider that the higher we ascend and the wider we can see, the more we desire, and it is often true, that as our horizon is more extensive, the more barren is the soil immediately around us. These are all common truths; but trite as they are, allow me to repeat, that he who can command every-

thing, will soon find that he must want something, he knows not what, which he cannot command. It is true, the rich man can enjoy more ; but on the other hand he can endure less. He now dares to envy the man whom he once only looked up to with hopeless admiration. He finds that the pleasures which he once enjoyed with exquisite satisfaction, have now strangely lost all their relish, and that there is not so much happiness in possession, as there was in expectation. There is a strange charm in the idea of property. We think the enjoyment of any good is infinitely heightened by the conciousness that it is our own. These little words exercise a powerful spell over our judgments. And yet, how many thousands are there, who, as soon as they are able to say of anything in truth, ' This is mine,' lose at once all their interest in it, and strangely neglect sources of enjoyment, which, when they possessed them not, they thought inexhaustible.

3. A third mistake on this subject, not less unfortunate than either of the preceding, consists in supposing that happiness is to be found in perpetual excitement. Hence thousands always confound pleasure with mirth, and think nothing tolerable which is not exquisite. Others think nothing pleasant which is not riotous, nothing interesting which is not boisterous, nothing satisfactory which is not intoxicating. It is this mistake which leads so many through the ever shifting varieties of dissipation, when what ought to be only an occasional

recreation is made necessary to common comfort, and all satisfaction is lost in the wearisome chase after novelty.

Others, from the same diseased fancy, cannot confine themselves to a single spot. They rove continually after new objects of imagination, taste, and knowledge. They cannot endure home-born pleasures, and every day enjoyments. Everything little seems to them insignificant, everything permanent seems to them tedious. All these mistaken pursuers of good are sooner or later the prey of excessive ennui. Having been always gay, they are never contented; always delighted, they are never tranquil. Having been happy only by the excitement of society, they are miserable when alone. Old age proves to such beings, if they ever reach it, a most oppressive condition. Deluded as they have been with the notion that happiness consists in perpetual excitement, in great events, strong feelings, continual novelties, and vivid pleasures, they sink into dejection, indolence, melancholy, and become weary of life before it is time for them to leave the scene of human action and enjoyment.

4. A fourth mistake in relation to happiness, is, that we make our provision exclusively for the present world; we do not take into view the whole of our existence, and of course, as soon as the season of activity is over, and we are so near the term of human life that we are compelled, however reluctantly, to think of the world which is

to come, we are filled with apprehensions of indistinct calamity, and thus the remnant of life is embittered. We find ourselves in the situation of beings, who are about to enter, naked and unfriended, into a new condition of existence. God has so constituted the nature of our happiness, that it will ever be impossible to attain to the full enjoyment even of this life, without taking into our view the life to come; for as long as there remains in any mind an apprehension, that it may exist hereafter, that mind can never be at ease till it is conscious of possessing some sources of happiness which this change of residence cannot effect. In comparison with eternity, what consolation is it to have laid up treasures here for ten, or for ten thousand years? What is the comfort of being clothed in purple and fine linen, and of faring sumptuously every day? No wonder he is never happy who thinks, whenever he reflects at all, that death will cut him off at once from all that he has been accustomed to call life; that the pleasures of the palate will no more reach the taste, the eye will no more indulge itself in the contemplation of fine forms, the organ of hearing will be no longer fed with the music of sweet sounds, and, every object of exterior employment at once struck out of his reach, he will be left with nothing but the intrinsic possessions of the mind and heart—and of these how small and worthless will be found the inventory!

Such, then, are the dreary consequences of having made no provision for any life but the present. It proves to you, that, to be permanently happy, we must extend our views, enlarge the sphere of our vision, the nature of our enjoyments, and take into consideration the whole of our existence. Especially remember that this world is but the infancy of our being. Our schemes of happiness, which extend no further than this life, are miserably defective. It is as if the child were to lay up a vast repository of toys and sweetmeats to feed and to amuse him when he arrives at man's estate. It is as if he were to collect a sumptuous wardrobe for his future life of vestments adapted to his boyish stature.

With all these sources of mistake, is it surprising that so few men are happy? Let us acknowledge that we have been mistaken. Let us instantly endeavour to correct our misconceptions. Let us confess that we have taken the most partial views of human life; that we have hewn out to ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

II. We will attempt to explore the true sources of christian and intellectual enjoyment, which brings me to the second division of my discourse, in which I proposed to point out the true and only sources of good, suited to the nature and destination of man.

We will examine this subject in reference to four circumstances of mind and character, which have

the most extensive influence on human happiness. These are our habits, our opinions, our imagination, and our temper. You observe, that we entirely exclude from this inquiry, every consideration of the outward circumstances whether of wealth or of station. Not that these are entirely without influence, but, as we have already said, their influence is much less than is commonly imagined; and it is an influence which may be easily controlled by higher considerations; an influence which is always diminished or modified by one or other of the mental qualities we enumerate. For there is no place so low to which the meek spirit of religious contentment cannot condescend, and none so high that the horrors of a haunted conscience and the pains of selfishness cannot reach.

1. As to the influence of our habits upon our happiness, to the young and to parents the inquiry is most interesting; for habits, you well know, are early and permanent. They are not to be put on and off like our youthful garments. The gay and vain creatures of fashion, the hour they are displeased with themselves in one dress, can change it for another; but the habit of dissipation and unsatisfied vanity is not so easily changed. If, then, you would secure to yourselves all the happiness which habit can effect, accustom yourselves from infancy to those occupations and enjoyments only, which you can at all times command. If you have been early brought up to depend upon circumstances over which you have no control, every change

will affect your comfort, and you will find every new situation tear up the roots of your long established pleasures.

The only habits consistent with uninterrupted happiness, are those of active exertion directed to benevolent ends. These never become wearisome, never painful. They always afford the mind a sufficient object, and always bring with them their own reward. They are not attended with any of the pains of envy. The satisfaction they furnish is not affected by the superior success of others in the same career; and if in any particular instance we fail of success, we have only to submit, with the approbation of our own minds, to the will of Heaven, or to divert our energies into a new direction. For the mind that is habituated to active goodness can never want a sphere of action, and it is a state which never requires relaxation nor tends to disgust and satiety.

That this is the true secret of happiness as it relates to our habits, is not less confirmed by experience than by the spirit and precepts of Christianity. The character of Jesus, as it is delineated in the Gospels, is a model of benevolent activity. He was always about his Father's business, and always foresaw a sure reward of his labors and sufferings in the increasing happiness of the human race. His mind was always filled with a vast object of good, and if there was any period in the course of his laborious life when he may be supposed to have enjoyed more satisfaction than at others, it

must have been soon after he entered on his benevolent employment, and passed rapidly through the cities of Galilee, healing all manner of sickness and all manner of diseases among the people, and proclaiming the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. Christians, the true secret of happiness, is, employment for the kindest ends and by the most honorable means. Compared to this, our habits of sloth and repose, of regular sensuality, of grasping avarice, of selfish occupation, whether of the imagination or of the senses, is nothing but sure and ultimate discontent. Dare to disregard, then, the common prejudices of the world in determining the system which shall govern your life, and remember that however painful any course of duty, especially that of benevolent, disinterested conduct may be at first to our selfish nature, time will render it the source of the highest tranquillity. The habits of a life of truly christian activity, will prove at last the only satisfactory objects of retrospection.

2. In the second place, with respect to the influence of our opinions upon our happiness, it is important that we should have those only which give us the most consolatory views of ourselves, of the world around us, and of God. I do not refer here to our merely speculative notions, which have no operation beyond the walls of our studies; but I mean those which take deep root in the mind, and exert an habitual influence upon our conduct. It is supposed, I know, that opinions seldom affect the course of life or the sum of happi-

ness. This may be true with the unreflecting and improvident, who look for nothing in the world but a pasture for their senses, and who never think upon the origin or destination of themselves or others; but in this description I hope few of my hearers are included.

With respect to those opinions, then, which have the most favorable influence upon human happiness, we again find, as on the former head, that revelation comes to our instruction, and in the light of the gospel, wherever we pass, the desert of the world blooms on either hand with hope. Can there be no difference in the happiness of that man who believes that all the rich manifestations of beauty in creation are without an author, all the evils in the world without a controller, and every event produced by a blind, unconscious fatality, and of him who sees at the head of creation a wise and benevolent Providence? Can there be no difference in the reflections of that man who looks upon this world as given up forever to be the spoil of men's wicked passions, and who considers himself placed on the earth merely to struggle for his share among plunderers and fighters for a little temporary provision, and of him who, by the light of the gospel, discerns the slow but sure melioration of mankind, and resting on the promises of scripture, looks forward to the day when all God's designs shall be accomplished, and even this world be changed into a region of peace and joy and christian perfection? Will there be no difference,

also, in the satisfaction of him, whose opinion it is that evil predominates in the visible creation, and that this world is a state of suffering, and of him who discerns, even here, the preponderance of happiness, and reposes with satisfaction on the proofs of divine benevolence, even in this state of human probation? Be assured, my friends, the doctrines of revelation are not less designed to promote our tranquillity than to advance our moral improvement. Especially consider, I beseech you, how important to our peace is that doctrine of Christianity which assures us of the pardon of sins upon repentance; which presents to us the God whom we have all offended, in the light of a Father willing to be reconciled; which satisfies us of the ground upon which this pardon is dispensed, and directs us to the mediation of the Son of God. The settlement of human opinion on this single particular, may be supposed to operate most powerfully on the sum of general and individual happiness.

As to the comparative effect of different views of Christianity upon the peace of those who entertain them, it is a subject too copious for this occasion. Allow me to suggest, however, that when any opinions upon this interesting subject produce habitual gloom and misanthropy, the nature of religion must have been misapprehended, and certainly the object of it defeated. In your search, then, after happiness, labor to acquire the most enlarged views of God's character and designs as

declared by revelation, and these, united with the benevolent exertion recommended under the former head, will go far towards securing you all the happiness which is to be enjoyed in this narrow sphere of the existence of an intellectual being.

3. If, in the third place, we consider the influence of the imagination upon our habitual tranquillity, we shall feel the importance of ascertaining the means of regulating its influence in a manner the most favorable to human happiness. There are many, I know, who derive little either of pleasure or of pain from their imaginations; but there are others to whom it is a source of exquisite distress, giving them the most dreary prospects of futurity, harrassing them with the terrors of superstition, or depressing them with the dark uncertainty of scepticism.

We have unintentionally anticipated, under the last head, some observations which belong more properly to this.

When the imagination is extremely lively, either from original constitution or from early cultivation, if it is not made a sweet fountain of felicity, it is usually converted into one of the most distressing sources of misery. Here, too, as before, the religion of Jesus enters, and offers the imagination an inexhaustible store of higher objects. The scenes which he discloses beyond the grave, are sublime and consolatory on the one hand, and fearful and mortally oppressive on the other. Can you, then, whose minds are formed to derive much

happiness from remote anticipations, hesitate a moment to secure the favorable influence of the christian prospects of felicity? My peace, says our Saviour to his disciples, I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. This is most true, my christian friends, and all the imaginable happiness which a mere philosopher can derive from the tranquillity with which he may be able to look forward to the events of tomorrow, or even the remainder of his days, is less than nothing in the estimate of human happiness, compared to the joys of a Christian's hope.

But in the wise ordination of Providence, the overpowering nature of these high anticipations is relieved by their remoteness, and the effect upon the Christian's happiness is not to raise him to perpetual ecstasy, but to keep up in his mind the glow of perpetual hope.

4. The last circumstance which we mentioned as exercising a powerful influence on human happiness, is the temper. We hear truly good men often lamenting, as the bane of their happiness, an instinctive irascibility. It is often, indeed, united with strong affection and benevolence, and often, alas! destroys the happiness which might be expected from a life of active exertion, not so much from the ill effect it produces on the mind, as from the misfortunes to which it leads, and these we are not always able to alleviate by the conciousness that they are entirely undeserved.

Ill humor is still more unfavorable to happiness than this irascible temper. It commonly originates in self-dissatisfaction, and leads him who feels it to refer the causes of his discontent to the imaginary faults of others, and keeps him in a state of perpetual peevishness. I need not, my hearers, tell you that to enjoy this life, it is necessary to possess a temper candid to the faults and mistakes of others, disposed to mutual accommodation, not easily provoked, and willing to see everything that occurs, in the most favorable light. Every one knows that he whose disposition is most favorable to his own happiness, is most agreeable to others, and that these common qualities of pleasing and being pleased mutually react upon and generate each other.

But, my friends, the christian doctrine carries this subject of the temper much further, and represents those dispositions as essential to happiness which we, in our worldly meditations, are too apt to despise, as if they exposed a man to insult or ridicule. If we read the beatitudes in our Saviour's sermon on the mount, we shall find the utmost meekness under injuries, the most unbounded forgiveness represented as the disposition which leads to happiness. We shall find a blessing pronounced upon that compassionate temper which sympathizes with all the miseries of human life, which shares in all the pains it meets, weeps with the weeping, and mourns with the bereaved. Still further does our Saviour bless the patient and

resigned disposition which bears without a murmur the severest afflictions of life, while we are disposed to envy the hardness of the man who can avoid or repulse them.

Ye proud spirits who cannot endure the humble genius of the religion of Jesus, weigh well this subject of happiness before you reject this self-denying system. Experience will decide against you, and vindicate the beatitudes of the sermon of the mount. For us Christians it is enough that Jesus has pronounced such tempers happy.

My friends, I have attempted to lay open to you the true sources of happiness. Follow the stream, and it will bear you away to the full ocean of eternal bliss. Do you now ask, who will show you any good? Jesus, my friends, calls to you from heaven; Whosoever drinketh of the water of life shall never thirst again.

SERMON XIV.

THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE YOUNG.

MATTHEW, VI. 13.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL.

THE life of every man of established religious principles has been a series of struggles. He has found it far more easy to form than to keep his best resolutions, and he has discovered also with alarm, that any course of conduct is far more easily depraved, than it is amended. Every moral observer knows also, that mankind do not agree to approve a character, which is today wicked and tomorrow good, which is habitually scrupulous in one duty and remiss in another; but we give the title of virtuous to that man only, the sum total of whose habits are uniformly on the side of virtue. This is one of the difficulties which make virtue laborious.

Upon further inquiry we find, that no man's goodness is innate and instinctive, but it is to be acquired by labor, and it is also corruptible by cir-

cumstances. Sanctification is progressive. Before habits of virtue can be established, temptations must be resisted, pleasures forborne, pains endured, danger encountered, sacrifices made, false steps recovered, and not a few moments embittered by the tears of penitence and remorse.

Nothing truly great is given to mortals without labor; and think you, that moral goodness, that most sublime and imperishable of human possessions, is the offspring of chance? Fortune may make a man distinguished, but it can never make him great; so nature may make a man innocent and amiable, but never virtuous. Neither is virtue that easy acquisition, that a man may secure it by flight from temptation. It is as if you were to expect to acquire a strong constitution by retiring to ease and sloth in the country, or as if you were to seek for uninterrupted health, by flying from infection. No, the strength of a Christian's virtue is the reward of frequent resistance and frequent victories. The child must fall often and hardly, before its step becomes firm.

From these remarks, however, do not understand me to mean, that where there is no temptation there can be no virtue. The highest degree of moral excellence is found, we know, in that Being who cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man. But, my friends, it hath appeared best to this all-wise Being, who made us, to create us an order of beings whose existence here shall be transitory and probationary. He has giv-

en us a nature which is capable of perpetual progress towards himself, and he that can advance, must be also able to retreat. The higher we soar, the stronger will be our flight, but the lower we creep, the darker and more encumbered is our progress. So insecure is our virtue, that we cannot stand firm without ascending to a considerable height, and the rewards of virtue are the more sensible, the more difficult they are of attainment. If this is the case, it does not become us to complain that we were not created angels, with incorruptible natures and instinctive goodness. The rewards of holiness, in such creatures as we are, are the very consequences of its difficulties, just as an estate of the same value is vastly more estimable to one who has attained it by his industry, than to him who inherits it from his ancestors.

But God, who has placed man in what may be called an enemy's country, has provided him with every auxiliary. He has not left him to roll darkly down the torrent of his fate. Precepts, example, promises, threatenings, honor, shame, suffering, reward, and every variety of means and motives, are provided from the first hour that the mind discovers any intelligence, to train it up to holiness and heaven. You may choose your weapon from the whole armoury of God. In the language of scripture, you may gird about your loins with truth, protect your heart with the breastplate of righteousness, and have your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Then, with

the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, you may be expected to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

It shall be my present object, to direct my remarks chiefly to the young and inexperienced. I shall first ascertain the true meaning of the words, 'lead us not into temptation;'

Secondly, point out some of the peculiar temptations of the young;

Lastly, offer some motives and considerations, which may serve to enlighten and fortify the inexperienced mind.

I. In reading the phrase, 'lead us not into temptation,' it should be remembered, that it was common with the Jews and indeed with all the Oriental nations, to refer to the immediate agency of Deity, every change in the appearance of nature, and every action of voluntary agents. How far this is philosophically or religiously correct, it is not necessary here to examine. It is enough for us to know, that an apostle has said, 'Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.' We understand the clause, then, to mean, 'Grant, that in the ordinary course of thy Providence, we may find ourselves in no circumstances, which may put our virtue to a trial too severe.'

The other petition, 'but deliver us from evil,' may be variously interpreted. It may mean exemption from temporal and natural calamities or from immediate danger. Thus interpreted, it will include only the miseries to which humanity is sub-

ject, disappointments, losses, sickness, and death. But as there appears to be an opposition intended between this and the other clause, it is not probable that deliverance from these natural evils only, would be made the antithesis to the dangers of temptation, which are of a nature entirely moral. 'Deliver us from the evil one,' is another and more literal expression of the original, and follows the first clause with peculiar propriety. We would first pray to be preserved from temptation; but if our virtue must be placed in perilous circumstances, we pray, that it may not yield to the arts of the adversary. Again; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil of it, that is, of temptation; a sense not much remote from the last, and amounting to a request, that trials and temptations may not prove ultimately injurious to our virtue.

II. My young friends, for to you are these remarks especially directed, allow me to warn you of some of the dangers of temptation, to which you are exposed. It may be observed, to the honor of the world into which you are about to enter, that the character of a deliberate seducer of the young is rarely known. It is that grade of depravity which the first apostate only has directly and seriously reached. You will soon, however, find men in society, who wish for associates in transgression, that they may palliate their vices to others and to themselves, by the multitude who are engaged in them, and who hope, that what is no longer singular may appear no longer criminal.

You will find others, who depend indirectly upon the vices of mankind for support, and who secretly encourage the corruption which contributes to their own emolument. In general, however, the instrumentality of others in our temptation is not direct, nor deliberate and voluntary. The unaided allurements of appetite and passion every one knows to be sufficiently powerful, without being stimulated by the persuasions of others. We may safely conclude with St James, 'that every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lusts, and enticed.'

It is true that every age and employment has its snares, but the feet of the young are most easily entrapped. Issuing forth, as you do, in the morning of life, into the wide field of existence, where the flowers are all open, it is no wonder that you pluck some that are poisonous. Tasting every golden fruit that hangs over the garden of life, it is no wonder that you should find some of the most tempting, hollow and mouldy. But the peculiar characteristic of your age, my young friends, is impetuosity and presumptuousness. You are without caution, because without experience. You are precipitate because you have enjoyed so long the protection of others, that you have yet to learn to protect yourselves. You grasp at every pleasure because it is new, and every society charms with a freshness which you will be surprised to find gradually wearing away. Young as you are upon the stage, there seems to be little for you to know of

yourselves; therefore you are contented to know little, and the world will not let you know more till it has disappointed you oftener. Perhaps it has been foolishly impressed upon your fancies, that it is expected of youth, that it should be gay, of age that it should be sober; that is the duty of youth to enjoy, and that age will bring the disposition to restrain, and the leisure to repent. You are yet, also, unsuspecting and credulous. Satiety has not yet produced disgust. Disappointment has not yet taught you, that the pleasures of sense and fancy, though they are the earliest, are not the most permanent of human pleasures. If you will not learn from instruction you must learn from experiment. Take care that it be not fatal.

Youth also, although it has not the deep rooted prejudices of age, entertains a thousand false notions, which are the consequence of superficial attainments. The reason of a young man, when it first begins to feel its powers, loves to sport itself in paradoxes and singular opinions. But in morals, paradox is always dangerous. The next step to justifying irregularity, is to practise it; and many a man looks back upon his early opinions with mingled astonishment and gratitude, and blesses God that his habits were never so corrupt as his principles.

It is true that age has its failings; but I believe it will often be found that the follies of age, though utterly opposite, are frequently the consequence of the sins of early years. The desire of accu-

mulating wealth, which is so natural to age, is likely to be most powerful in him, who in his youth was profuse and extravagant. That querulousness and discontent, which, in age, are sometimes the attendants of real infirmities, are not less frequently found to be the punishment of the excesses of early life, spent too carelessly and exhausted too soon. Those ill humors, which we kindly excuse by calling them natural to particular seasons of life, are usually the dregs of former indulgences. The follies of the young are sometimes amiable in the eyes of the world; but it is the punishment of amiable sins, to lose in after life all their charms, and to be the more odious the older they appear.

Entering then into life, you will find every rank and occupation environed with its peculiar temptations, and without some other and higher principle than that which influences a merely worldly man, you are not a moment secure. You are poor, and you think pleasure and fashion and ambition will disdain to spread their snares for so ignoble a prey. It is true they may. But take care that dishonesty does not dazzle you with an exhibition of sudden gains. Take care that want does not disturb your imagination by temptations to fraud. Distress may drive you to indolence and despair, and these united may drown you in intemperance. Even robbery and murder have sometimes stalked in at the breach, which poverty or calamity has left unguarded. You are rich,

and you think that pride and a just sense of reputation will preserve you from the vices of the vulgar. It is true they may; and you may be ruined in the progress of luxury, and lost to society and at last to God, while sleeping in the lap of the most flattering and enervating abundance. Let the prayer of Agur be included in the petition of our text. 'Lead me not, O God, into temptation by giving me either poverty or riches; but feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord, or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.'

Again; you are educated for a sedentary and contemplative life. You expect to know little of the manners of the age, and to look at a safe distance upon the vices and seductions of the world. To avoid temptation by flying to solitude has been a perpetual delusion of studious minds. This is the principle upon which the monastic institutions of many religions have been founded; institutions, which, as has been acutely observed, have been supported rather by the fear of vice, than the love of virtue. But do not flatter yourselves that retirement has no dangers. The very security from temptation, which the recluse imagines himself to enjoy, is itself a temptation.

A life of study also tends insensibly to foster a species of intellectual selfishness, which a more liberal intercourse with mankind would replace with more valuable, though perhaps less extraor-

dinary, dispositions. In solitude the benevolent feelings cannot attain their full growth; a proud misanthropy is indulged, and a man may imagine himself too pure or too intellectual for society, when he is only too proud.

I will not attempt to enumerate even a small part of the temptations, which await you in the active pursuits of life. I only know that you will sometimes find yourselves in exigences, where contending passions will beat against your sternest principles. I hope they will be founded upon the rock of the gospel. You will find, here, sudden prospects of gain opening upon your fancy, and obscuring your clear perception of justice. There, secrecy and silence will encourage you to voluptuousness. Conviviality, good fellowship, and the exhilarating influence of society, will steal away your time, and perhaps tempt you to the intemperate use of sinful pleasures. If, in the language of the world, you are so happy as to please, and to be taken up by those who control much of the amusements and pleasures of the day, fashion will betray you into a thousand senseless extravagances, and what I fear more, will surely repress many a noble quality, too exalted for the standard of the day. But, my friends, when I think of the insensible force of general example in every rank and employment of life, I fear that you may be fashioned only for this world. There is a perpetual and unobserved influence of custom, to which, as soon as we rise in the world, we all unconsciously

bend, like young plants which have been growing up straight, while they were low and secluded, as soon as they reach the height where the light is admitted from without, they bend all their leaves and branches insensibly toward the part where there is the strongest glare. The influence of popular manners conceals from us our follies and our vices among those of the world. My friends, the vigilance which alone can preserve you, must be unwearied. The contest may be severe, but the victory will be glorious, and the reward will be eternal.

III. But to portray dangers, without considering how you may guard against them, would be not only useless, but unfavorable to your security. Let me then, thirdly, suggest some considerations, which will always come to the relief of our sinking or fluctuating minds, when they are the prey of strong temptation. Previously, however, let me beseech you to remember, that the aid of God's spirit is promised to every holy resolution and to every sincere exertion. It is not less philosophically than theologically true, that no effort in the cause of goodness is ultimately lost. God never paralysed an arm raised in the cause of virtue.

The first and strongest motive which I can offer you to resist early the temptations of sin, is, the consequences of a single victory or a single defeat. The life of man is a campaign, the result of which sometimes depends upon the first battles. And

need I tell you, Christians, that the consequences of your youthful conduct, extend through a series of ages, which the imagination even, cannot reach? If death were really to close your expectations forever, you might take the gay delights of the Epicurean. You might eat and drink, for tomorrow you would die. You might float pleasantly down the stream of time, lying on your oars, and laughing at those who were laboring against the tide. But, my friends, when I look forward only a few years, I see you in the immediate presence of that Power who has given us a being, which he has told us we can never abdicate. You may die; but you die to live again, and to tell how you have lived. It will not be enough to say that thousands have run the short career of ruin before you. They will rise up from their sleep of the tomb to accuse you of having followed them. We have a great trust deposited in our hands. It is no less than the gift of eternal life, and we are to account for it; even if nature were to perish, we must account for it.

Consider also the honor of a faithful resistance to the temptations of the world. Your struggles are secret, they are unknown to the world, and therefore the world cannot reward you. Or if it should reward you, you will find its loudest applauses dying away at last upon your ear, and the still small voice of God's approbation shall be sweeter than the music of the spheres.

Again; look steadily at the character of a man of established virtue and christian excellence. How noble a creature is he in God's creation! lord of himself, though destitute of everything. Sin has no dominion over him. The world reverences, but cannot reward him. Observe him with attention. If his foot sometimes slip, he falls to rise again. Passion may sometimes surprise an unguarded fortress, but the citadel is safe; the soul is strong in faith, and in devout reliance on the succor of Heaven. The food which nourishes him descends from above, and the supply cannot be shut out by the world.

My young friends, I would direct your attention to the character of your Saviour, and beg of you to study it till you love it and dare to imitate it. We soon search after great examples to encourage us in this folly and that vice, fond of resembling the great, if it be only in their defects, and sinning with less compunction, if we can only sin in company. Look at the Son of God, who was just entering, like yourselves, a hostile world, inexperienced and without a friend. Scarcely had he commenced the great business of his life, the duties of his ministry, before, as a preparation for it, he underwent the severest discipline. In whatever way we interpret the history of our Saviour's temptation, it cannot be understood otherwise, than as presenting a severe and distressing trial of his mind. He had early to struggle, then, with

the temptations of interest and vanity and ambition, but the tempter was in each of his plans defeated.

At another period of his life, you will find him invited to assume an unlawful power, and fully able to avail himself of the enthusiasm of the multitude, and to be crowned king of the Jews. But rejecting every allurement which might divert him for any season from the proper business of his ministry, he retires alone to a desert place, casting aside those honors, which have in every age tempted the ambition of his less humble followers.

Do not be contented, my young friends, to read and admire what you may imitate. The example, even of the Son of God, from his cradle to his grave, is transmitted to us that we may imitate it.

The last resource against temptation is prayer. Escaping, then, from your tempter, fly to God. Cultivate the habit of devotion. It shall be a wall of fire around you, and your glory in the midst of of you. To this practice the uncorrupted sentiments of the heart impel you, and invitations are as numerous as they are merciful, to encourage you. When danger has threatened your life, you have called upon God. When disease has wasted your health and you have felt the tomb opening under your feet, you have called upon God. When you have apprehended heavy misfortunes or engaged in hazardous enterprises, you have perhaps resorted to God, to ask his blessing. But what are all these dangers to the danger which your

virtue may be called to encounter on your first entrance into life? In habitual prayer, you will find a safeguard. You will find every good resolution fortified by it, and every seduction losing its power, when seen in the new light which a short communion with Heaven affords. In prayer you will find that a state of mind is generated which will shed a holy influence over the whole character; and those temptations, to which you were just yielding, will vanish with all their allurements, when the daystar of devotion rises in your hearts.

With this view, our Saviour has inserted the petition in the text, 'lead us not into temptation.' Let us dwell upon it in every prayer. If, in the words of a pious man, 'sinning has not made us leave off praying, praying will make us leave off sinning.' Watch, then, my young friends, and pray, that you enter not into temptation.

SERMON XV.

SINCERITY.

1 Corinthians, V. 8.

BUT WITH THE UNLEAVENED BREAD OF SINCERITY AND TRUTH

The apostle appears here to be giving directions as to the mode of observing the communion. In imitation of the feast of passover, before which the Jews were required to remove all leaven out of their houses, and eat the festival with unleavened bread, the apostle exhorts the Corinthians to observe the distinguishing rite of their religion, which commemorates their deliverance from sin and death by the sacrifice of Christ, with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. This injunction, which is here particularly applied to the celebration of the supper, it is my intention to consider in its importance to the whole character of a Christian; for he who has come forward to this characteristic ceremony hypocritically or in the spirit of imposition, cannot be supposed to be more sincere in the rest of his conduct.

Sincerity is a word which is often used in an indeterminate and unsatisfactory manner, so that we often hear men called sincere who have no other quality in the world to recommend them. A man may be sincerely impious, or sincerely intolerant. He may be following his judgment, and even his conscience, when he is offending against the laws of God and man. In the common sense of the word as it is opposed merely to dissimulation, the quality is negative, indifferent, not much to be desired, and sometimes dangerous. When it is applied, however, to religion, it is used in a good sense, and usually includes the idea of unqualified and hearty devotion to the will of God. Still, even when used with reference to religion, it is sometimes made a convenient substitute for some more specific description of men's character and motives, and we are glad to avoid a close scrutiny of the justice of the opinions or conduct of ourselves or others, by saying, when we can say nothing else, that they are sincere.

Thus it happens that when the subject of religious opinions is discussed, and some one is found who deviates from the common standard, and question is made of his correctness, the conclusion often heard is, 'He may be erroneous but he gives proof of his sincerity.' When the principle on which a man acts is canvassed, and doubts are raised of the religious or moral character of another, and some are proposing one test of character and some another, the inquiry is usually ter-

minated by saying, 'Though he may be imperfect or mistaken, yet we have reason to think him sincere.'

A word of such common and convenient application, deserves to be thoroughly understood and cautiously used. Especially in our examination of ourselves as well as of others, it is of importance that we know what it is we pretend to, when we lay claim to sincerity.

In this discourse it will be my object to ascertain what is implied in the character of religious sincerity; and in doing this, I shall first consider with what imperfections sincerity is consistent, and in the next place endeavour to point out some of the most sure and indispensable tests of this quality.

I. 1. In the first place, then, sincerity is not inconsistent with some degree of prejudice. Such is the constitution of human nature and the circumstances of our education, that the best of men find it impossible to grow up without receiving many prejudices against individuals or descriptions of men, as well as against opinions, which greater age and further information are necessary to correct. Thus we find in the evangelists that the excellent Nathaniel, when he is first informed of the origin of Jesus to whom he is introduced, cries out, in the true spirit of a Jew of that age, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? This appears to us a most absurd and unworthy prepossession; yet it did not prevent our Saviour's immediately

giving this very Nathaniel that memorable character, 'Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.' This instance in the evangelical narrative, should teach us candor in our judgments of men, and encourage us to make every allowance for inevitable prejudice, where it is not obstinately and unjustly cherished. The true difference between a sincere and insincere opinionist, is this; that the former, though he is not free from unfortunate biases, is yet willing to be free from them. He neither flies from conviction, nor does he close his eyes against evidence. He is a friend perhaps of particular men, or attached to particular opinions; but he is neither afraid of the progress of truth, nor does he place impediments in the way of examination. The insincere bigot, on the contrary, stifles his convictions and perverts testimony. He is angry when he is found in the wrong, and dissembles when he is really convinced of his error. His prejudices are personal, and his views are selfish and malignant. Not so the guileless Nathaniel, for he came at the invitation of Jesus, saw, and was convinced.

2. Again; religious sincerity is not inconsistent with considerable ignorance. The whole history of pious men bears witness to and illustrates the all-comprehensive nature of true religion. We find in the gospels, that the apostles, who were most sincerely attached to their Master during his life, were yet ignorant of his real character till after his resurrection. They could not be persuad-

ed that he was to suffer, and even after he had suffered, their minds were full of his royal character, and they were expecting to see him restore the kingdom to Israel. Before the vision granted to Peter, the disciples had no suspicion that the favor of God was to be extended to the Gentiles; and if we may judge from the language of some of them in their epistles, they seem to have expected the end of the world during their own lives, and the return of Christ from heaven. Now, whoever will consider the importance of these facts and doctrines, such as the suffering of Christ, his real character as Messiah, the comprehension and extension of his church, and the time of his second advent, must acknowledge that they were subjects of what we should call fundamental importance in the christian dispensation. If, then, the early disciples could remain under such gross misapprehensions on these subjects, and yet be regarded as the sincere followers and friends of Christ, it is surely too presumptuous in us to say of one another, that a denial of this or that tenet, which to us appears plainly revealed, is yet inconsistent with another man's religious sincerity, or a state of acceptance with God. It may be that unity of sentiment as far as some would wish to carry it, has become necessary to unity of affection; but we ought to inquire whether we are not wrong in harboring that temper of mind, which makes this unity of opinion necessary to christian affection. You perhaps have attained to certain fundamental

principles of christian belief, which appear to you so clear, that you are astonished how any one who reads the scriptures can for a moment doubt them. You are conscious of your own sincerity, and it is enough; and therefore it is natural for you to conclude that he who does not think like yourself cannot be sincere. But let us remember that when we once begin to make that a test of others' sincerity which we know would have been of our own, we go beyond our christian liberty; for no one but God has a right to say what is fundamental to any individual, or what extravagances or errors may coexist with humility and honesty of mind.

3. Religious sincerity is not inconsistent with occasional lapses, or considerable infirmities. There is no man upon earth who doth good and sinneth not; and if God should be strict to mark iniquity even in the most sincere, who could stand before him? Thus it may happen that the most devout Christian may find his affections sometimes languid and his thoughts sometimes wandering; but if this were the habitual state of his mind in prayer, he would have reason to be alarmed, and we should doubt his sincerity. The meek may sometimes be betrayed into passion, and the temperate into excessive indulgence; but the proof of his insincerity in such cases would be, not that he fell into the sin, but that he fell into it without remorse, or exposed himself again without precaution. There are some faults to which the most

ardent and open dispositions are peculiarly exposed, and there are others of the habitual temper which never appear in the ordinary and public deportment. If, then, you would know what faults of your character may excite a doubt of the sincerity of your religious professions, be assured that your sudden infirmities of temper are not half so sure a test of your religion, as what may be called your ruling passion and tenor of life.

4. Religious sincerity is not inconsistent with a man's doubts of his religious sincerity, or with a great degree of diffidence and concern. It is true that every man must know whether the regard which he pays to God and to his duty is affected or real. He must know whether his religious services are paid to God or to the world, and whether his conduct is only an outside show of conformity to virtue, or proceeds from a firm principle of rectitude within. This knowledge, however, of his own spirit, is consistent with the most humble and fearful sense of imperfection, and with frequent depression and despondency. 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it'? By this is not meant, we conceive, that a Christian cannot judge of the sincerity of his own professions or of the state of his own determinations at the time when he considers, but only that such is the weakness of human virtue, and such the liableness of man to conceal from himself his real character, that no man can at any time feel secure of his future

happiness. It is equivalent to the assertion that no man can say, I am sure of not being betrayed into any future transgression.

The doctrine of confidence has often been insisted on most unadvisedly and unjustly, by some who make it an essential test of a christian character. As far as we may be allowed to judge, that kind of security and inward testimony of faith, to which some Christians have laid claim, is not consistent with that temper of fearing always, which is made a scriptural characteristic of a good man. Neither is it consistent with those expressions of the apostle Paul, who surely could have had no doubts of his own sincerity, where he says, Neither count I myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

May we not conclude, then, that a consciousness of sincerity in the service of God, is something entirely different from that assurance of salvation, and that confidence of God's favor, to which some Christians have aspired? That mixture of humility which belongs to real religion, is a mixture of fear; and it never was intended that any conviction of our religious sincerity should entirely subdue it, because no man can ever be sure that he shall not fall from his present steadfastness, nor can any man look back with unmingled satisfaction on his christian character.

II. I have now mentioned several imperfections with which religious sincerity may be united. I proceed to the second head of my discourse, which is to give you some of the most essential marks or tests of this temper. My christian friends, this is a subject of primary importance in religion. Without sincerity our obedience is sin; without sincerity our religion is but vanity and guilt. We cannot deceive God; we may deceive, perhaps we have deceived ourselves. Examine yourselves, then, whether you be in the faith; prove your own souls.

1. In the first place, you have great reason to doubt of your religious sincerity if you make no progress in holiness. Every principle of real virtue is an active and a progressive principle. It cannot leave a man satisfied with his present attainments; and if you have ever found yourselves long stationary in your religious characters, the probability is that you have been retrograding. The path of the just is as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day. He who carefully examines himself, cannot avoid discovering his imperfections, and he who is afraid to discover or negligent in the search, has no sincere disposition to correct them. Whatever you may choose to call the ruling principle of a religious life, whether the fear or the love of God, whether it be gratitude, or humility, or ambition of intellectual improvement, all, all urge us forward to greater attainments. Is it love? Real love is never

tired with pleasing its object, never at ease when it has suspicion of offending it. Is it gratitude? Gratitude never thinks it has done enough. Humility never feels itself secure, and the love of the intellectual always grasps at something higher. If then, my friends, you find in yourselves a disposition to circumscribe the limits of your duty, if you find that you endeavour to steal as much as you can from your obligations, and give as much as you can well spare to the world and its pleasures, if you are continually comparing yourselves with others, and think you have done enough when you have done more than they, you have great reason to doubt the sincerity of your religion.

2. In the second place, if your most secret and private actions are not as pure and correct as your public deportment, you have no claim to the praise of religious sincerity. I ask you, then, if your intercourse with God in private is devout; or if your public reverence of religious institutions is only the result of your deference to the habits of the community? I ask you if you prefer to give your alms in private, when no eye but God's discerns it, to giving them in public, where spectators will allow you the credit of the alms; or whether you are not uneasy, till, by your own or others' means, your benefactions are known? I ask you if, in your most trivial negotiations, you are as scrupulous and honest as in your large and notorious transactions; whether the absolute security from detection would not tempt you into anything like

injustice? I ask you if your conduct in your families and with those over whom you have control or with whom you are intimate, is as carefully regulated by the laws of christian benevolence as you would lead us to believe from your public conduct; or are you a Christian in church and a tyrant at home? In short, is your religion a spirit which animates you, and which gives peace to your heart, and not a countenance which you assume? Would it be the guide of your life if there were no one to observe you but Him who seeth not as man seeth?

3. Is your obedience universal and unlimited? This is a most essential test of religious sincerity. Do you make no exceptions in favor of particular vices, and continue to live in some habits which your conscience tells you are not precisely right? The meaning of that passage in James, 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all,' includes this test of religious obedience. Why guilty of all? Because, if he deliberately and habitually makes an exception in favor of some passion, lust, or habit, he discovers that he really has no sincere respect for the authority which establishes the whole law.

There are several cases in human life which may illustrate the nature of the principle of religious obedience. What should we, for instance, think of the sincerity of that man's friendship, who should make all the professions of attachment, and

appear through the greater part of his life devoted to his friend, who should yet deliberately desert him in his time of need, or betray, when tempted, one only of his most important secrets? Thus no course of religious obedience has any claim to the praise of sincerity, which is not unlimited and without reserve. A religious man will not say, 'I am not guilty of this or of that offence, but I hope God will pardon me for a particular habit, which I find it difficult to relinquish.' Neither will he say, 'I am sensible of the guilt of a particular course of conduct, and if God spares my life I will break off at such a future time.' Oh no! my dear friends, this is the most horrible hypocrisy. It is such trifling as nothing can atone for. The man of this partial obedience, and the man who is continually deferring the day of his repentance, is yet in the gall of wickedness and the bond of iniquity.

Lastly; what appears to you the governing motive of your conduct? In those portions of your character, in which your zeal is most engaged and your exertions most strenuous, what is your object? the promotion of your own interests and the interests of your party, or the benefit of mankind, the glory of God and the cause of virtue? How far is your sense of your duty to God predominant in your life? Does it lead you to sacrifice your property and your reputation and whatever you hold most dear, where you are most evidently pledged, or have you contrived to conceal even from yourself the real motives of your behaviour,

and to avail yourself of the name of religion and of God's honor, when you have nothing of them but the name? In short, is not your reverence for God, your sense of religious obligation, affected by the changes of the age and the character of your cotemporaries? Are you on the Lord's side, even if you stand alone?

My friends, this subject of sincerity is of infinite importance to us. It is the foundation, the grand preliminary of a religious character. It is indispensable to the acceptance of any of our services. Without it our religion is our condemnation, our observances and rites are the records of our sin. Without this, it is impossible to have any satisfaction in duty; religion will be our burden, God our terror, our consciences our stings, and death will overwhelm us with inconceivable dismay. With this only can we assure our hearts before God. For if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things. But, beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things.

My christian friends, especially you who are now to sit down at the table of the Lord, grace be with you who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. This, this is that wedding garment without which you cannot be welcome, without which, indeed, you cannot enjoy the feast. Your sincerity here you must test by the disposition with which you celebrate the supper. Have you a sense of

the reason for which it was instituted, and do you observe it because Christ has instituted it? Do no unworthy motives mingle with your conduct? Does this regard for Christ's authority pacify your minds, and give you a happy satisfaction in the discharge of this duty, which the opinion of the world does not interrupt? Do you cherish no secret inclinations to dispense with the rite, or take to yourselves no peculiar merit in the performance? Are you sensible of that goodness and greatness which you commemorate, and do you seek for those benefits and no others which this rite is calculated to give? Have you a sense of the mercy of God in the scheme of human redemption, and are you sincere in your dispositions of love toward your fellow Christians? If so, come forward in full assurance of faith, rejoicing in the testimony of your conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity and not with fleshly wisdom, you keep the feast. Draw near with a true heart and without dissimulation.

SERMON XVI.

THE PECULIAR BLESSINGS OF OUR SOCIAL CONDITION AS AMERICAN CITIZENS.

MARK, V. 19.

GO HOME TO THY FRIENDS, AND TELL THEM HOW GREAT THINGS THE LORD HATH DONE FOR THEE.

THE poor man to whom this was said, had been cured by Jesus of a most fearful disorder, and so affected was he with gratitude, that he instantly resolved to attach himself to his benefactor, and spend with him the remainder of his life. 'No,' said our Lord, 'rather go home to thy family and friends in Decapolis, and tell them what great things God hath done for thee.' We are told that he obeyed, and began to proclaim openly in his native country, and among his domestic friends, the compassion and kindness of Jesus.

I wish, at this time, my friends, to call your attention, not so much to our public advantages, as to our private, personal, and social blessings. If we would awaken our sensibility to the innumerable blessings of our condition, we must not take too wide a range; we must limit our vision to some

near and definite objects, lest, taking too extensive a survey, we should view everything indistinctly, and remember nothing with precision in the boundlessness of God's benevolence.

There is a class of blessings, which, because we have so long enjoyed them, we are tempted to forget that we possess, and to regard as the constant and immutable laws of our condition, rather than as favors no less extraordinary than they are unmerited. I mean the peculiar circumstances of our social and domestic life; circumstances to which no man can say that he has especially contributed, for they are the result of God's good providence, watching over former events and early habits, rather than of any foresight and judgment of our own. I am the more induced to make these the subject of our grateful review, because from their silent, unobtrusive, and permanent nature, they are not apt at any one time to make a peculiarly forcible impression, and they are in danger of being overlooked, because they are so uniform and quiet, except by a mind tenderly and piously alive to the goodness of God. The truth is, that we are very much in the habit of keeping ourselves in ignorance of the real sources of our happiness. The unexpected events of life, and much more those on which we calculate, are far from being those which constitute its real enjoyment. Even events of public good fortune, which call forth the most frequent and audible acknowledgements, are really not those which contribute

most to our personal well-being ; and much less do we depend for our most valuable happiness, on what we call fortunate occurrences, or upon the multiplication of our public amusements, or the excitement, the novelty, the ecstasy, which we make so essential to our pleasures, and for which we are always looking out with impatience. It is not the number of the great, dazzling, affecting, and much talked of pleasures, which makes up the better part of our substantial happiness, but it is the delicate, unseen, quiet, and ordinary comforts of social and domestic life, for the loss of which all that the world has dignified with the name of pleasure would not compensate us. Let any man inquire for a single day, what it is which has employed and satisfied him, and which really makes him love life, and he will find that the sources of his happiness lie within a very narrow compass. He will find that he depends almost entirely on the agreeable circumstances which God has made to lie all around him, and which fill no place in the record of public events. Indeed, we may say of human happiness what Paul quotes for a more sacred purpose, 'It is not hidden from thee ; neither is it far off ; it is not in heaven that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us that we may enjoy it ; neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, but it is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart.'

I. In the first place there is an extraordinary degree of tranquillity and security always attending our social condition, which constitutes much of its value. Repose, it is true, is not always a blessing; certainly not where it is the repose of desolation, of insensibility, or the threatening stillness which precedes the whirlwind. But where it is the result, as ours is, of peculiar habits and local circumstances, of which almost the whole world may be envious, and for which at this moment millions are praying, it deserves to be most gratefully acknowledged. It is this singular tranquillity, which gives to our external and intellectual advantages unspeakable worth. There are other countries, in which much more wealth is accumulated, but where the proprietor trembles while he casts up his treasure, and grasps it the closer, not so much from avarice as fear. There are countries, where you may find more numerous refinements, society more intellectual, polished, and advanced; but where do you find minds so entirely at ease, where communication so unshackled by apprehension, where opinion so little fettered by custom or power, and man so much the master of his pleasures, his means, his language, and even his thoughts? Our social intercourse is nowhere disturbed with apprehension. We enjoy what we have, almost without forethought, not because we know not but we may be dispoiled of it tomorrow, but because we have a sentiment of its duration. The noise of war has been rolling con-

tinually at what seems an indefinite distance, and, instead of disturbing, it has rather, like the thunder of an evening cloud that has passed over, contributed to our deeper repose. We hear of the disasters of other nations, and we sometimes tremble for them with benevolent apprehensions and hopes; but it is not because we have a child or a friend exposed to the dreadful hazards of battle; it is not because we are doubtful whether the event may not have decided the fate of our property, our liberty, or our comfort, but because we feel a natural interest in their sufferings, which cannot and ought not to be extinguished. We seem to feel a permanency in everything around us, and a security which we hardly know how to explain. Whence then this peace and order? To whom are we indebted for them? Can any man say that he has essentially contributed to their continuance? If we ascribe them to our peculiar habits and manners and government, we must acknowledge the good providence of God, directing the circumstances which have established this security. Go hence and tell thy friends, who it is that hath preserved peace in thy borders, and learn to trust not in thyself, but in Him.

II. Our social and domestic condition is, secondly, distinguished by a diffusion of competence and of the means of prosperity, in which every man has a share. Where do we find families, or individuals, who do not, in some comfortable degree, partake of all the essential comforts, which

wealth can procure? Who is driven out of society because he is too poor to partake, in some form, of its pleasures? Every morning's sun, as it rises, brings to every man a provision for the day, or lights him to the means of procuring it. How much may be retrenched from every station in society, before poverty can be even perceptible? and how much more, before we should hear the cry of want? Who among us returns in the evening to his family, to have his heart broken by the cries of his children clinging to his knees for bread? Whose sleep is disturbed by the thin phantoms of tomorrow's difficulties? So general is our prosperity, that if we would find distress we must look for it; it does not obtrude itself upon our notice. The miseries which really exist, do not throng upon us so fast that the hand of charity is exhausted before it can effectually relieve them. We see frequent changes from luxury to mediocrity, but how faint and rare is the cry of real and incurable wretchedness. Contrivances for comfort meet us at every door we enter. Everywhere the table is spread, and the cup is filled; everywhere, we find men ascending from convenience to comfort, to neatness, to elegance, to luxury, to profusion. No one is cast out because he is unable to support his place in this continually ascending feast of abundance. The wants that are felt, are rather the cravings of appetites that have been pampered, or of ambition too much excited, than of real poverty. In the prodigious

extent of an unoccupied country behind us, there seems to be left a common fund for every man's exigences. The reduced and the unfortunate change their residence, and if we hear of them again, it is only to hear of their prosperity. We look around for the poor, and we meet with here and there the infirm, the diseased, the aged, the imprudent, and the profligate foreigner, but for native, irremediable want, we search in vain. Instead of poverty, we find, indeed, discontent, envy, avarice, overreaching, and profuseness; and we are told of disappointments and bankruptcies, but these are the miseries of abundance, not of indigence.

If you would know your own happiness, contrast with it the condition of those parts of the world, where the reduced and humbled man of wealth and of rank looks round in vain for the means of employment; where the poor are deprived of all the real comforts of society, and compressed into manufactories, mines, hospitals, and prisons, or driven into armies, and left to perish unsought, unwept, unremembered; and then go home, for you have a home, and to your friends, for even these your poverty will gain you, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you. Truly the lines have fallen to us in pleasant places, and we have a goodly heritage.

III. A third characteristic of our social condition, is the general diffusion of the means of obtaining knowledge, from which results that intel-

lectual cultivation which is better than wealth, and which gives the highest interest to social life. In this region of our country, if we look round for the ignorant we shall find them indeed without trouble; but if we look for those who are condemned by disadvantages of birth and situation to unavoidable ignorance, we shall search in vain. Here no man, who feels the intimations of his intellectual life, and begins to pant after knowledge and truth, need waste away in hopeless obscurity, shut out from the means of knowledge and secluded from the society of the intelligent. What is peculiar in our society, is, that nothing debars any one from reaching, if he pleases, the highest degree of intellectual improvement; nothing forbids his sharing in any refinement or excellence, which he is capable of enjoying. Such is the equality of conditions among us, that the intelligent and the unintelligent mingle everywhere together; every man gives and receives according to his gifts, and each shares in the peculiar improvements of all. We have no monopoly of information; the rich and the poor, the mechanic and the merchant, the ignorant and the learned, the idle, the inquisitive, and the laborious student, may all go and drink at the same springs; and there is kept in continual circulation a fund of intellectual riches, which every man may use, and to which he is not debarred from contributing.

The actual amount of intellectual wealth, and the enjoyment derived from it in general society,

may be very much surpassed, as it undoubtedly is, in other countries. But here nothing restrains the eagerness of curiosity, nothing frowns upon the free exercise of the powers, in conversation, in writing, and in speaking; and how much is there continually within our reach, to refine, to soften, to elevate, and to delight us! From how much weariness are we thus relieved! How many vacant hours are thus employed! How many sorrows soothed, and spirits elevated! How many minds lifted out of the dust! How much sensuality is thus wiped away, and how much is added to the value of human life! Those who know how much the love of knowledge tends to correct the follies of society, to purify its pleasures, to preserve from vicious amusements, and to fill up the vacant spaces of active life, will feel grateful for the state of society, where no man need be ashamed to appear well informed, nor is any man obliged to bear the mortifying burden of his ignorance, longer than he chooses.

IV. Closely connected with these great advantages of our intellectual condition, and indeed, forming the most valuable part of them, are the blessings of our religion. I cannot express to you the sense which I have of the value of that influence on society, which yet flows from our ancient habits of thinking on this most interesting subject. I am ready to exclaim with the ardent Zecharias; Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, according to the

mercy promised to our fathers, in that he hath granted unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, may serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life. When you consider, my christian hearers, of what importance is a sense of religion to the good order and purity of our social intercourse, you will thank God, that so much of it has been imperceptibly retained among us. For it is this, which will give to society a degree of security and impart to it a confidence, of which no other sentiment or principle can supply the place; and where this exists, free, pure, rational, conscientious, and devout, it gives to the character a tone of dignity and freedom, which no accomplishment can bestow. When you think how easy it is, nay, how common it has been, to make religion the bane and terror of social life, the destroyer of everything kind and generous, the source of the most depressing superstition, bitter jealousy, and malignant passions, your hearts ought to be filled with gratitude at the circumstances of New England. What are we, or what were our fathers, that we should enjoy a toleration the most perfect, which nothing but the bad passions of individuals can disturb; a freedom of worship and of opinion, which smiles at the powerless impositions of men; and a general liberality of thinking, which has an unobserved influence upon many who do not acknowledge it; and that with all this, notwithstanding the growth of our luxury, and the temptations

of our good fortune, we should yet retain so much respect for the institutions of the gospel, and so much sense of its indispensable value to society? When I think of all these peculiarities of our religious condition, and ask how they have arisen, I can find no other answer, than that the good Providence of God alone has preserved to us such an inheritance of blessings.

Let me lead you, last of all, back to your families, and refresh you with the sight of the blessings of your domestic life. Indeed, if I were to search for a spot where you could best observe the effect of the blessings we have already enumerated, and best feel the peculiar happiness of your social condition, I should only open the door to your own firesides, and place you in the circle of your children and your friends. There it is, indeed, that you ought to enjoy the united influences of all the other advantages we have mentioned. If you are not happy there, the fault is not in your circumstances, but in your dispositions. For when we consider the enviable state of the domestic relations among us, of husband and wife, of parents and children, we are at a loss to suggest any improvement, except in the use of these advantages. Notwithstanding the rapid encroachment of luxury, it has not yet so corrupted our modes of life under the pretence of refining them, that parents are daily separated from their children. You may at any time, collect them around you, refresh yourselves with their innocence, watch their budding

talents and virtues, and enjoy their happiness. The intercourse between you and your offspring is not disturbed by any foolish customs and formalities; no rights of primogeniture enter, to kindle jealousies and coldness. As they grow up successively, they gradually pass into your companions, your friends, and at last your counsellors; perhaps your stay and consolation. So abundant are our means of living, that your children are not driven unprovided for from the paternal roof, to seek elsewhere a precarious support. No officer of despotism bursts open your doors, to drag the reluctant youth to be sacrificed on the field of battle, nor does every mail bring you intelligence, which makes your heart bleed, of some new exposures or new sufferings which they are called to endure. So various and accessible are our means of education, also, that parents may always have some new pleasures in expectation from the improvement of their children. Soon they become qualified to partake of your own intellectual pursuits. Their curiosity keeps yours awake, their improvement rewards you; and the domestic circle every day brightens with new accessions in intelligence and pleasure. Thus they grow up with you at home; and here, at least, this blessed name yet expresses a reality, a substantial good, a sanctuary, a refuge from the troubles of life, the very centre of our national happiness. And when the fear and love of God dwell under your roofs, when his worship purifies, and makes holy these domestic

enjoyments, when your prayers, as they ascend morning and evening, draw closer the sacred ties of parent and child, brother and sister—but I need not dwell on the minutiæ of your blessings, I need not paint, what your hearts, if they are rightly attempered, will represent to you with more vividness and reality. Go home then, for you have a home, and tell your children what great things God has done for us.

This recital of our blessings, however grateful it may be to the mind, is yet attended with two considerations, which press upon our attention. The first is, how little have we ourselves contributed to these advantages. They seem in truth to be the gifts of Providence alone, for we can hardly trace them to any positive causes. When we reflect upon our social and domestic lot, one thing is always evident, that if all the good we find can be traced to the care of a most gracious Providence, all the evil to which we are exposed may be traced directly to those passions, which the most favorable state of society cannot always suppress, to those corruptions which grow, alas! and ripen under the very sunshine of our prosperity. The other consideration which may make us all tremble, is how long shall this state of prosperity last? Has God given us a pledge of uninterrupted security and good fortune? or does not its continuance depend much upon ourselves? If the cup of our prosperity intoxicates us, will it not fall at last from our hands and be dashed in pieces?

My friends, let us think before we part, of the duties which our very happiness imposes upon us. Ought we not, first of all, most gratefully and humbly to adore the distinguishing goodness of God? Perhaps we have hitherto overlooked the real foundation of our happiness; perhaps if we have been sensible of the good, we have not thought of the Author. We have entered this garden of God, and carelessly cropped the flowers with which it is filled, and thought them planted only for our gratification. This is not the condition on which any of God's gifts are bestowed.

Our common prosperity is indeed unexampled, but it is not out of the reach of injury. While it lasts, it is the duty of every man to contribute what he can to preserve it. If you would advance the glory of your age, and make it worthy of being remembered by those who shall come after you, beware of the encroachments of luxury. Nothing will so much tend to make you insensible to the best gifts of Providence, and callous to the purest pleasures of life, as the love of noisy and frivolous distinctions, the pursuit of vicious pleasures, and the tyranny of fashion. Consider whether you do not contribute to the corruptions of the age, by an immoderate pursuit of amusement. Consider how easily the minds of those who are coming into life, are enfeebled and deluded by the doubtful examples of those whom they are taught to consider as giving the tone to the manners of the age.

To preserve our social pleasures in any good degree of purity, nothing will so much contribute as the cultivating a taste for domestic life and the quiet and affectionate pleasures which it affords. In such a state of society as ours, also, there is danger lest the love of money, or of merely sensual idleness, should overwhelm the rising generation. To obviate these evils it is much to be desired, that the love of literature and of intellectual pursuits should be greatly encouraged; for though the passion for knowledge is no proof of a principle of virtue, it is often a security against the vices and temptations of the world. Everything which you contribute to the institutions of sound learning and to promote a correct and pious education, you contribute to the peace, the purity, and the glory of the age.

Once more, my friends. What a treasure of felicity you have in keeping! And by you it is to be bequeathed to those who are to be your successors, in a long posterity. Let your thoughts run on a few years in prospect, and can you endure to see those whom you have brought into life, whom you have trained up to fill your places, and whose destiny you now influence, can you endure to see them spoiling this rich inheritance, and then reproaching your memories? Can you look, without remorse, and see them taking their places in society, depraved by your example, lost to virtue, to peace, and to Heaven?

Do not think you have discharged your obligations when you have laid up for them a perishable inheritance on earth, when you have given them a customary education, and set them up in life. Oh no! God, who watches over our employment of his gifts, demands of you, not only that you dedicate your children to him, but that you implant in them his fear and love, that you furnish them with the only sure sources of happiness, by your lessons of piety, by your example at home and in public, and by your prayers with them and for them. Without this you may leave them the wealth of the world, and it will only curse them; you may leave them the rank, the glory, the reputation of their fathers, and it will only render them the decorated victims of the indignation of Heaven. Consider, then, what obligations to others your privileges impose upon you. Walk within your houses with a perfect heart. Make them the nurseries of godliness, resolve that from this day you will not neglect this most solemn of your duties, and then with a grateful heart tell your friends what great things God has done for you.

SERMON XVII.

THE PRACTICABLENESS OF THE EXAMPLE OF OUR SAVIOUR.

HEBREWS, III. 1.

WHEREFORE, HOLY BRETHREN, PARTAKERS OF THE HEAVENLY CALLING, CONSIDER THE APOSTLE AND HIGH PRIEST OF OUR PROFESSION, JESUS CHRIST.

WHEN we rise from the contemplation of the character of Jesus, it is with a mixture of transport and of despair; of transport at finding that such immaculate excellence was embodied and exhibited in a human form, and despair lest it should be impossible to imitate it in the present mixed condition of human life. I know not how any man can take up any one of the gospels and read it through, without feeling that there is something supernatural about the character of Jesus, without catching at intervals a glimpse of that divinity which seems to encircle him, or perceiving the truth and nature of the Centurion's exclamation, when he heard the last expression which escaped from the lips of the dying Saviour, 'Truly this was the Son of God.'

The moral character of Jesus is distinguished from that of every other teacher's upon record, by this peculiar circumstance, that it united excellences which are usually thought irreconcilable or which are very rarely found conjoined in any individual. Endued as he was with power which was calculated to impress beholders with the most reverential awe, he united with this a familiarity which admitted on easy terms of communication, all the grades and classes of society. He knew how to effect, also, that rare union of zeal with candor, which we seek in vain in other celebrated reformers. He combined, too, the utmost activity with a prudence which never deserted him, and irresistible power with unassuming gentleness. Look at his character from one point of view, and you would think he was formed only to suffer; from another, and he appears destined only to act. He was sensible of his high character and pretensions, yet meek and gentle and unresisting. Though he abated not from the rigor of his Father's requisitions, yet he was the preacher of a religion which offers relief to the burdened and succor to the miserable. In one word, he brought together in his character the utmost perfection of opposite, I might almost say, incompatible excellences.

To dwell upon the character of Jesus, is the delight of every Christian, not merely because it confirms his faith, but because it has a salutary effect upon his own character and disposition, and those advanced Christians who have satisfied them-

selves of the historical truth of Christianity, repose afterwards upon their original convictions, while their faith is continually strengthening itself, not merely by time and habit, but by those irresistible impressions which are made by a frequent and diligent reading of the New Testament.

It was no small part of the great design of God, when he interposed to reveal himself among men by his Son, to give us a living, visible specimen of human nature, such as it may become when the operation of the gospel has its full influence. Hence it is a remarkable circumstance in the character of Jesus, that, though he was so intimately united with God, and had power committed to him in heaven and in earth, his example is in every moral respect strictly practicable. It is an example to men in every condition. It teaches us how to live on earth, as well as to prepare ourselves for heaven. In every useful point of view it is accommodated to the imitation of common men.

It is my intention in this discourse to consider what may be called its practicableness; that is, its practicableness as an example of social virtue held up to the imitation of such beings as we are.

In the first place, consider how completely this example would be marred and rendered ineffectual, or even dangerous, if the most piercing scrutiny had discovered a single stain in the character of Jesus; I do not say if such a stain had really existed, but even if it had appeared from the narrations that there was anything which wore the ap-

pearance of immorality. The difficulty would be insuperable even supposing it to arise merely from some defect in our knowledge of the circumstances of the case. We should labor under a burden which nothing could remove, because it might be said that no Christian was obliged to follow a master as divine, who had discovered a deficiency in that purity which he had made the object of his religion. In this respect, as in many others, the character of Christ remains eternally distinguished from that of any other teacher in the history of the world. It is not merely from the accounts of his friends that we venture to make this assertion, but it is conceded even by his enemies. In all the busy murmurs of history about the characters of men, not a whisper can be distinguished which calumniates the founder of our faith. Compare with this the character of Socrates, who, great and good as he was, and often as he is made the theme of philosophical declamation and impertinent comparison with Jesus, was more than suspected of indulging in some of the fashionable vices of his age and country. And the divine Plato is not more clear of imputations. Need I mention the character of Mahomet; the privilege which he claimed of peculiar indulgence, his notorious sensuality, as well as his personal ambition? This list might be enlarged, if it were necessary, by the names of the most eminent philosophers of antiquity.

The singular usefulness of the example of our Saviour appears, secondly, in this, that his whole life, as far as we are acquainted with it, was a life of active and substantial goodness. All his purposes were benevolent, all his practice disinterested. If he had not had it expressly in view to exemplify the great precept of his religion, that no man liveth to himself, he might have merely declared the purpose of his mission and confirmed it by some splendid prodigies. If it had not been one great part of his mediation to leave us a perfect character of goodness, why should he have led such a laborious life of kindness? He never wrought a miracle without some gracious effect or moral purpose. He was indefatigable in relieving the real wants of men, in curing those diseases which human art could not reach, in assuaging their most distressing sorrows, in restoring to them their most essential comforts, as well as, in some instances, administering to their convenience and contributing to their pleasures. He does not merely tell them what they ought to do; he does not content himself with merely reproaching them for their sins and railing at their ignorance, but he does all in his power to instruct in the most condescending, and to correct in the gentlest manner, their unfortunate prejudices. Whatever period we assign to our Saviour's ministry, it was a space crowded with acts of essential goodness.

I will proceed now to mention some of the traits in the character of Jesus, which bear upon the

main subject which I would keep in view, the practicableness of his example.

His conversation and conduct are complete specimens of what may be called coolness and soundness of mind, qualities indispensably necessary in one who would do good to the best effect, without defeating his own purposes by precipitancy, or endangering his life by imprudence. He discovers at all times a disposition to avoid dangers where it was consistent with his duty, but he encounters the most dreadful hazards when the destination of his Heavenly Father made it necessary for the accomplishment of his purposes. He does not, like a rash enthusiast, throw himself in the way of persecution, for in many places of his history we find him withdrawing himself from the pressure of the multitude and the observation of his enemies, when such an exposure would have precipitated the fatal catastrophe which he had constantly in view. He escapes with the utmost prudence from the ensnaring questions of the rulers, and does not, in the heat or the pride of his commission, permit himself to be embroiled in a controversy or a tumult. His replies are always judicious, his courage is perfectly sedate and without the least symptom of timidity. It is also plain that his boldness is not the effect of passion. In short he displays that very temper which he, who would do any great and singular good in a difficult world, must possess.

It is often the misfortune of those who have the most ardent love of mankind and the most disinterested spirit of philanthropy, that their zeal is misguided, their courage borders on rashness, their passions are the first guides which they follow. Their best designs are therefore sometimes defeated by imprudence resulting from excess of virtuous ardor. Such is the imperfection of human exertion. But in our Saviour we discover a warmth of goodness which never enkindles and consumes itself; an intrepidity which never sought for approbation; a presence of mind which was never surprised by the arts of his enemies, which was never lost in a moment of indignation.

There is another class of good men in the world, who, with the best dispositions to do good, and with a sincere concern for the character of others, have yet not sufficient resolution to meet difficulties, nor fortitude to bear reproach, in the service of truth and virtue. They talk well, but they dare not act. They wish to see a change, but dare not appear alone in any important measure, or even to take a share of that danger and suffering which must always belong to active integrity or great enterprises. Not so was the Saviour of the world. He kept no terms with corruption, he made no excuses for hypocrisy, and propitiated not the resentment of guilty men of power. He knew how to meet the eye of hardened guilt, without fear of man, when he was discharging his duty, and without transgressing the obligations of a cit-

izen or a subject. He did not utter his censures in private, and then fly from the consequences of his opinions, but he met iniquity in front, and appealed for the truth of his reproaches to the consciences of those who heard him. Neither was he more indulgent to the faults of his friends, than to the crimes of his enemies. He was not afraid of losing them by reproving what was really vicious, or by warning them of their temptations and their weakness; at the same time that he managed with the greatest address their unavoidable prejudices, and mildly corrected their ambitious expectations.

Again; I would mention a trait in our Saviour's character which is peculiarly deserving our notice and imitation. I mean his constant superiority to motives of fame or reputation. The great sin, which pollutes even the most illustrious actions of men, is the mixture of vanity. We find it in characters otherwise almost faultless; we detect it in our best services. We often resort to it in education, and we find that it exercises an unsanctified influence where we should least expect it. When we discover it in others, it is with a sentiment of regret, which impairs our admiration, and when we detect it in ourselves, if our hearts are allowed to answer before God, it is with a sentiment of mortification and humility. It is certain, that the most exalted minds are most free from this mixture, and it is the first and last object of the gospel thoroughly to discharge it from our

motives. Jesus was at an infinite distance from desiring to receive honor from men. Possessed of powers which could in an instant have drawn around him a body of enthusiastic and devoted followers and have elevated him to any station or authority he could desire, he is yet employed in teaching humility to a few ambitious disciples. When they would take him by force to make him a king, he escaped from them. He would not work a miracle merely to excite their admiration, and refused to give them the sign from heaven which they solicited. Not a word which he ever uttered, nor an action which he ever did, was calculated merely to excite applause. It seemed to be his care not to awaken any stupid wonder by singularity or austerity, or an imitation of the manner of popular teachers.

But there are also in the conduct of Jesus marks of disinterestedness which are worthy of admiration. He uniformly evinces the utmost unconcern about his personal appearance and accommodation. There is one instance of this which deserves to be pointed out. He had been engaged in earnest conversation with a Samaritan woman. In the mean while, says the evangelist John, 'his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat; but he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.' He discovers no

inclination to increase his fortune or provide for his family. He seems to take pains to show that he was completely disengaged from all family influence, because he had, in more than one instance, discovered a disposition in his relations to avail themselves of his character and to look to him for advancement. Hence the apparent harshness of his reply to those who told him that his mother and brethren were standing without, desirous to speak with him. He answers, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? And he stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, Behold my mother and my brethren.' This indifference to his personal or family interests shows only that there was nothing worldly-minded in his character, not that there was any want of affection or of the feelings of consanguinity. On the contrary, we may safely challenge the records of true history or of the pathetic in fiction, to produce such specimens of inimitable tenderness and affection, as are contained in our Saviour's admirable discourses to his disciples just before his death. 'Having loved his own that had continued with him, he loved them unto the end.' There is in these discourses that rare mixture of piety and tenderness, which is interesting beyond any other combination of human sentiments. The man who can read the last chapter of John without emotion, must be himself destitute of piety, or insensible to the characteristics of a superior mind under the influence of strong affection.

With his disciples, the most striking part of his conduct, is, I think, his wonderful patience. He found them enslaved by prejudices as inveterate as those of the rest of his countrymen. It is true they had left all and followed him. But wherefore? Not from any disinterested attachment to his cause, for they were every day expecting that he would assume the splendor of a temporal prince, and assign them the highest dignities in his triumphant administration. Not from any love of the pure doctrines he inculcated, for they appear to have continued, even to the time of his ascension, ignorant of the spiritual nature of his mission. They were no doubt attracted at first by the miracles which he exhibited. They thought it safe to be found in the train of a teacher who seemed to have the elements at his disposal, and the laws of nature within his control. Hence our Saviour found it extremely difficult to give them any just expectations of the sufferings to which they would be exposed. He would discourse to them of humility, of suffering, of contempt, of painful exposures; yet, their fancies were continually employed in sketching out plans of his future royalty and their own advancement, and at the end of a discourse calculated to suppress all their ambitious imaginations, they could coolly ask him, which of them should be greatest? Without expressing any impatience, he would repeat again his lessons of meekness, and try, by every variety of instruction, to correct their presumptuous hopes.

Though they had been long with him, and had seen miracles enough to satisfy them at least of his ability to provide for any multitude of followers, yet they are found murmuring and anxious because they had taken no bread, and were themselves in a desert place. Jesus shows no resentment at their want of confidence, but simply asks them if they have forgotten the two instances in which he had fed thousands of followers from a few loaves.

The behaviour of Jesus to Judas, is in particular a remarkable instance of the benignity and generous patience of his character. Though he knew from the first that he was secretly forming his purposes of treachery, yet he forbears to expose the designs of the traitor to the rest of the little fraternity, lest, impelled by sudden indignation or a holy zeal for their Master's security, they should commit some act of rudeness, and thus drive him to some desperate attempt, or at least exclude him from all opportunity of repentance and conversion. He forbears even to excite the suspicion of the disciples against him, during the whole time he was with them, that he might not interrupt the harmony which prevailed in the little circle.

In that distressing scene of his agony, when he begs them to watch with him through those moments of inconceivable horror and anguish, when he retired to pray, he returns and finds them asleep. Instead of reproving, he even finds an excuse for them. You are fatigued and need this

refreshment. 'Sleep on now and take your rest.' How pure and unexceptionable must have been that partiality which he discovered to John, the beloved disciple, when we cannot find that it awakened any jealousy in the breasts of the ambitious fraternity, but, on the contrary, this young pupil in the school of Jesus could lean on the breast of his Master without offence, and Peter, who denied him, could be melted into contrition by a passing look! Once we are told, that Jesus wept. It was at the grave of a friend whom he had long loved. And why did he weep? Not for the loss of Lazarus, for he knew that with a word he could restore him to life and present him to his mourning sisters. But he was melted by the signs of sorrow which they and the attending mourners discovered. He could not resist the contagion of sympathy. Mary and Martha, the disciples and the Jews were weeping around him, and the Son of God was moved also. It is indeed unexampled in the history of human character to find such industrious and active benevolence, and such consciousness of one's own powers, mingled with a passive tenderness of nature susceptible to all the emotions of sorrow.

The social character of our Saviour, in his intercourse with the generation among whom he lived, deserves next to be considered. Such was our Saviour's mode of life that he was obliged to be much in company. Not having where to lay his head, he was frequently found at the tables of the rich and in the houses of his friends.

The wonderful familiarity to which he admitted those who approached him, and the readiness with which he administered to the wants which were made known to him, are also striking traits in the social character of Jesus. The sense of his own superiority seems never for a moment to have obstructed the activity and the cheerfulness of his benevolence. He preserved the utmost frankness with the utmost civility and condescension. It was his delight to raise the humble, to encourage the timid, to place those whom the proud despised, in the light of his favor, and to anticipate the requests of those who were fearful lest they should trouble him.

It appears to have been one principal aim in the public character of Jesus, to do the greatest good in the most private and unobtrusive manner. 'He neither strove, nor cried, nor was his voice heard in the street.' Acting always upon the great principle that mercy was better than sacrifice, he did not scruple to violate the superstitious rigors with which the scribes had corrupted the sabbatical rest; and he avoided encouraging any of those vexatious restrictions which the Jewish hierarchy had added to the original severity of the Mosaic institutions. It appears to have been his object to reform the Jewish nation without abolishing the moral law, and we cannot conclude from anything that is recorded of our Saviour, that it will be necessary for the Jewish nation, upon embracing Christianity, to relinquish the service of the syna-

gogue, or the moral institutions of their great lawgiver.

Lastly; our Saviour has left us a pattern of conduct in extreme suffering. The prospect of his death was evidently terrible to him. His prayers betray the agony of his mind. If he had possessed any tincture of enthusiasm, or of the infatuated courage with which other martyrs have gone to the stake, we should have seen none of those symptoms of excessive sensibility, which the evangelists, without disguise, ascribe to him. Yet with such impressions of his sufferings he attains at last a state of perfect acquiescence, deep resignation, and greatness in submission. He dies without extravagance either of hope or fear. He cries out from the cross, 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit, and having said this, he gave up the ghost.'

I have selected these parts of our Saviour's character with a sparing hand, and with the single view of illustrating what I have called the practicableness of his example. Every one of these qualities is not only attainable by us, but of great practical importance. His unsuspected purity of life, his unwearied and benevolent activity, his equanimity, coolness, and prudence, mingled with a fortitude which nothing could crush, and a boldness which disdained to equivocate with the wicked; his contempt for mere applause, and superiority to personal convenience; his unequalled affection for his disciples, and to crown all, a superintend-

ing piety, which always led him to the most complete acquiescence in the will of God; these are not the qualities of enthusiasm. They do not depend either upon the supernatural character, or the miraculous power of Christ; neither are they peculiar to him in his character of a teacher; but they are qualities, without which no man's virtue can be sound, no man's character perfect in practice or in principle. They are qualities indispensable to man in society; they are not the excellences of a recluse, who shuns the world to keep himself pure; they are not the virtues of supererogation, like the practices of monks and acetics, but they are the essential constituents of a substantially good character, proper for the world, as well as inseparable from greatness and elevation of mind. No man can rise from the study of this character and say, 'It is very sublime and perfect; but what is that to me? The subject of it moves in a sphere which I can never reach; he is a wonderful character, but useless as an example for the purposes of life.' On the contrary, the Christian must be satisfied that while he remains destitute of any of those principles of excellence, which were exemplified in the life of Christ, he is essentially defective in the christian character.

I cannot leave this subject without a few more remarks on what I have called the practicableness of the character of Christ and the nature of his instructions. Not only did he not affect singularity in his mode of life, which is the sure companion

of enthusiasm; not only did he dress, eat, converse like other men, but he evidently suffered his disciples to do the same. He supposes them to follow some profession, to be fishermen, soldiers, taxgatherers; to marry, to submit to magistrates, to carry on their usual business, and, when they could be spared from his service, to return again to their respective callings.

Our Saviour's instructions are not like those of Rousseau, adapted to man in an inconceivable state of nature, to which this visionary enthusiast would recall them. They do not require men, like some of the ancient Stoics, to throw their wealth into the sea, or to inflict upon themselves unnatural austerities. But everything about Jesus, in precept and practice, is mild, cheering, great; everything is suited to the precise wants of man in society.

And in his death—who would not submit to crucifixion, could he but die in the temper of Jesus, could he but commend his spirit with such confidence to God! He has died for us, that he might teach us how to die. My friends, may his courage fortify us, may his devotion warm our hearts, and may we never think his commandments grievous, or his example impracticable.

SERMON XVIII.

ON THE FRIENDSHIP OF OUR SAVIOUR FOR THE APOSTLE JOHN.

JOHN, XIII. 23.

NOW THERE WAS LEANING ON JESUS' BOSOM ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES, WHOM JESUS LOVED.

WHAT an expression is this! The disciple whom Jesus loved! There was one then in the fraternity of apostles, whom it was not invidious to call the favorite of Jesus. This beloved Son of the Almighty Father, whose whole soul was continually filled with the magnitude of the undertaking in which he was engaged for the salvation of a world, and at whom men and angels were gazing with admiration; this Jesus, who had experienced, through the whole of his ministry, nothing but scorn and ingratitude from those whom he came to save, who knew that he was soon to be sacrificed for this hard-hearted world, who was, at the point of time to which our text refers, anticipating the defection of his dearest friends and followers, and touching upon those fearful scenes in which his holy and benevolent life was ordained painful-

ly terminate; in a word, this friend of man, of weak, lost, wicked man, in all ages, countries, and conditions, has himself one friend who leaned upon his bosom, and whom he best loved. What an affection must that have been, which was not dormant in the breast of Jesus in such an hour as this!

Let us attend, first, to the history and character of John, and

Secondly, to the peculiar affection which existed between him and his Master. The reflections which follow may throw some light on the nature and value of that virtuous friendship which is not inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel.

I. It is a remarkable instance of the modesty of the New Testament writers, that they say so little of themselves. Two of the evangelists, Matthew and John, were admitted to the most familiar intercourse with Jesus, and were honored with the gift of apostleship and its supernatural endowments; yet we hear nothing from them of these distinctions. We should not know, except from traditional authority and from undesigned intimations, discovered in their writings, that they were the authors of the gospels which now bear their names. When they speak of themselves, it is in the third person; and then they record their own faults and mistakes, some of which were of no small importance, with the most amiable ingenuousness. In their love and admiration of the Saviour, whose history they were writing, they seem

to have forgotten themselves, and so completely are the historians lost in their subject, that if they drop a hint of themselves, it seems to be rather to diminish our respect for them, and to direct it all to their Master.

In the case of John, it would be especially gratifying to know somewhat more of the circumstances of his life, that we might discover what there was in his disposition that made him a favorite with Jesus. His gospel and his epistl s seem to be the breathings of a soul full of love, and we can hardly believe that it was this affectionate disciple who would have called down fire upon the village of the Samaritans, or who petitioned for the highest honors in his Master's expected kingdom.

It is generally supposed that John was the youngest of the twelve disciples. We know that he and his brother James were the sons of Zebedee and Salome, who is called by one of the Fathers a daughter of Joseph, by a former wife, and of course related to our Lord. This circumstance, if true, very naturally accounts for the petition of their mother, that her two sons might sit on his right and left hand in his kingdom, as well as for our Saviour's recommending to John, as he was expiring, the care of Mary, his own mother. The youth, the tenderness, the consanguinity of John, no doubt then, kept him near the person of our Saviour while he lived, and generated that peculiar attachment, which, in this favored disciple, would not allow him entirely to desert his Master

in the hours of his anguish and dissolution. It is true that upon our Saviour's arrest, all the disciples forsook him and fled; but John, and John alone, as far as we know, returned and stood near the cross, watching the departing spirit as it lingered on his lips, while he commended his weeping mother to this disciple, and his enemies to God. John saw the body laid in the sepulchre, he was with Peter and visited it after the resurrection, and he was present at all the appearances of our Lord to his disciples.

By this evangelist is recorded an interesting conversation after the resurrection, in which our Saviour tried the love of the fallen and repentant Peter, and predicted his martyrdom. But Peter was curious to know what should be the fate of John. 'Lord,' said he, 'what shall this man do?' Jesus saith unto him, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the disciples, that this disciple should not die.' Thus was Peter's curiosity rebuked, and the fate of John rendered an object of attention.

From the concurrent testimony of ecclesiastical historians, he alone of all the apostles appears to have survived the destruction of Jerusalem. There are many stories related of him by christian writers, to which we are not authorised to give implicit belief. There is one, however, which is so characteristic, and so much in the spirit of his epistles, that we are willing to admit it on the

high authority of Jerome. 'The blessed apostle John,' says he, 'living at Ephesus to extreme old age, and being with difficulty carried to church in the arms of the disciples, and being unable to make a long discourse, every time they assembled was wont to say nothing but this, "Little children, love one another." At length the disciples and brethren who attended, tired with hearing so often the same thing, said, "Sir, why do you always say this?" Who then made this answer, worthy of himself; "Because," says he, "it is the Lord's command, and if that alone be done, it is sufficient."'*

II. I proposed, secondly, to illustrate the affection which subsisted between Jesus and his disciples, and especially that which he felt towards John. Turn your thoughts towards that last supper, when the Saviour of the world sat surrounded by his disciples. He knew that they had followed him hitherto, rather from interested than from affectionate motives. He knew that they expected from him gifts and distinctions which he would not and could not bestow, and were even at that moment mistaken as to the nature and true character and purpose of his mission. He knew also, that they would forsake him as soon as he was completely in the power of his enemies; that one of them would deny him; that another would betray him, and that all, as soon as their favorite expectations were disappointed, would prove timid and faithless. The very disciple who was leaning

* Lardner, chap. CXIV. Sec. VIII. 4. 3. in vol. 5, page 42. Ed. 1788.

on his bosom, and who loved him best, he foresaw would yield to his fears; and yet, with all this knowledge of his desertion, his love to this little family, not one of whom had any claims upon his affection, was undiminished and stronger than death. He pours out for them that affectionate prayer, which the angels who waited listening around him, might carry with them, weeping, to heaven.

What a soul must his have been, my hearers, which was at the same moment filled with that vast object, the redemption of a world, and yet had a place left for twelve such disciples! which could discover such tenderness for these timid and ignorant companions, just as he was himself entering on a scene of suffering, the solitary contemplation of which, in the garden of Gethsemane, threw him afterwards into such a fearful agony! But in the presence of these twelve friends he seemed to be thinking of nothing but of the sufferings which they were to encounter, of the death which they were to suffer in his cause, and the distressing uncertainty and terror into which they would be thrown, when they saw his fate was inevitable. He spends, therefore, the last moments of his most precious life in elevating and fortifying the humble minds of these men, in imparting to their weak spirits a portion of his own views and hopes; nay, more, in praying for them that their strength might not fail, that they might be one with him as he was one with his

Father. 'Having loved his own, which were with him in the world, he loved them to the end.' Oh how enviable was the lot of the young John, to lean on such a breast as this, to be the friend of such a friend!

In the life of Jesus Christ we see the highest state of perfection in which the particular and universal affections can coexist in the same heart. We see a scope of love which embraced the whole interests of humanity, and yet contracted itself to the friendship of an individual; a spirit which could weep, at the same time, for the miseries of a world and for the impending destruction of a single city; and which yet, with all this enlargement of views and strength of sympathy, retained the most exquisite sensibility to the personal sufferings and infirmities of our sensitive nature. When we look at the example of Jesus, our perplexing disputes about selfishness and disinterestedness, about universal and particular affections, seem at once resolved; inconsistences and difficulties vanish, and we see how, in a well regulated mind, all the affections, private and public, may be preserved in perfect harmony, each in its proper sphere, exercise, and intensity, never interfering because properly subordinated to each other, and all happily adjusted to the nature and circumstances of such a being as man.

The only difference, except in degree, which appears to have existed in these affections, as they were found in Jesus, and as they are found in his

disciples, is, that in the latter the most general affections are derived at last by degrees from the more private. These, in our minds, are first generated by the circumstances in which we find ourselves from our birth. But in our Saviour, the order appears to have been reversed; for in his mind every act of love and kindness, every limited exercise of affection, seems to be only a sensible expression of that general philanthropy, with which his mighty soul was originally and continually filled. What in us is always imperfect, because formed by insensible degrees, seems in him to have been always perfect and unlimited. Ours is the affection of mortals; his was that love of God which passeth knowledge. It was the same spirit, which, although in that well known hour of solitude and prayer, it seemed absorbed in the dread of crucifixion, so that the sweat ran down like drops of blood, through anguish and sorrow—for he felt as a man—yet, when he was in the actual horrors of crucifixion, and probably at the period of the most exquisite bodily pain, caused the strength of his filial affection to burst through his anguish, and commend his mother to his friend John, that mother, in whose presence he had lately said with apparent insensibility, 'If any man will follow me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children, he cannot be my disciple.'

As we proceed, we find him cherishing the fondest feelings towards John, his relation, and towards Lazarus and his two sisters. He was in

the habit of taking Peter and James and John apart with him in those seasons when he was to enjoy and suffer most. Thus we discover the nature of his attachment, that it was really a particular fondness for these individuals, especially for John. Yet he could say to these very favorites, 'If ye love them who love you, what reward have ye? for sinners also love those who love them.' If we ascend yet higher in the scale of his affections, we discover an ardent degree of patriotism in his pathetic strains of lamentation over a city which had rejected him. 'Oh Jerusalem! Jerusalem! hadst thou but known, in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathers her chickens, under her wings; but ye would not!' And yet, while he was thus lamenting the fate of his countrymen, his imagination was filled with the grand forethought of the innumerable multitude, who should come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, to sit down in the kingdom of God, while his own people should be cast out.

The reflections which we shall offer you on this subject are not many.

1. In the first place, how astonishing is the inconsiderateness of those unbelievers, who have attempted to raise an objection to the relig on of Christ, from the circumstance that the gospel nowhere expressly enjoins the virtues of patriotism and friendship. This objection was first suggest-

ed, in his insidious manner, by the Earl of Shaftsbury; and, what is yet more extraordinary, Soame Jenyns, in an eloquent defence of Christianity, has produced the very omission of these virtues, as one proof of the divine origin of the gospel morality, merely because they are qualities so much esteemed among men, and therefore would not have been omitted in any scheme of moral precepts of which men were the framers.

With the virtue of patriotism we are not at present concerned; but it is indeed extraordinary that any one, after having read the history of our Saviour, should represent either of these virtues as irreconcilable with the spirit, or unprovided for in the system of Christianity. Did they not remember that touching scene at the grave of Lazarus, that friend whom Jesus loved? Did they not remember how he wept, so that even the Jews exclaimed, 'Behold how he loved him?' Could they have remembered his tender consolation of the two afflicted sisters, and the domestic endearments in which he shared with that interesting family, after he had restored their brother to life, and yet could they say that Jesus esteemed these particular attachments false and fictitious virtues?

But it is said that friendship is nowhere expressly recommended to us in the New Testament. True, it is not; and here I think is a singular proof of the thorough knowledge which our Saviour possessed of the human heart, and especially of the nature of our virtuous affections. For is it

not easy to see, that it would have been absurd to enjoin particular friendship upon any man, as a necessary part of his christian or moral character? That which is peculiar to this attachment, as it is distinguished from general good will, is not anything which depends upon a man's voluntary exertions. No man can go out into the world and say, 'I will have a friend.' This, like other connexions in life, often depends upon circumstances beyond our control. It depends not merely upon a man's general benevolence of character, but upon a fortunate consent of affections and harmony of interests, which a man may live long in the world and not be so happy as to meet. It requires such a concert of tastes and passions, such a length and frequency of intercourse, such a candor and unreservedness of mind, as we may not easily find or command in thousands whom yet we greatly esteem, and in many more with whom we are disposed to live on the common terms of peace and good neighbourhood. To have enjoined then a social attachment like this as a subject of duty, or as an essential obligation on every man, whatever may be his circumstances, is an absurdity of which Jesus and his disciples could not have been guilty; and yet this omission has been charged upon the friend of John and Lazarus as a defect in his religion. Many, I doubt not, are the Christians, who have passed through this world of frequent changes and various characters, and yet have never chanced to find a real friend. Many

more are there, who have wept over the grave of some one, long known and loved, but alas! as they had not the power to awake him from his slumbers, so too they have not had the good fortune afterwards to replace him.

2. The second reflection, which I shall make, is, that if we would practise this virtue, if it must be so named, in all its purity, and enjoy our fondest attachments in perfection, we must call in to our aid the religion of Christ. Tell us not of the heroic friendships of ancient story, when it was thought generous to sacrifice a whole nation for an injury to a friend, and when the duties of this attachment were exalted above all other obligations, and allowed to break every other tie, and benevolence itself was lost in the pretended despotism of private love. Tell us not of those modern connexions, which demand of us in honor to sacrifice one man's life to vindicate another's name from false imputations, nor of the numerous pitiful unions of wicked men, for purposes of interest or indulgence, conviviality or temporary convenience. These have as little to do with affection, as with religion. True christian regard is as different from all this, as lust from pure love, or bodily strength from real courage. The only perfect union of minds will be that which is animated, corrected, and matured by the evangelical spirit of Christianity. Why? Because their faith and hopes are not only one through their present destiny, but because man has interests and hopes

in eternity, dearer and greater than any temporal well-being, and that union of minds into which eternity enters not, and makes no part of their common hopes, must be essentially defective; because this idea, rendering the affection which it influences more sublime and more interesting, must make it superior to any temporary union of views and purposes, how many years soever may have cemented it. You anticipate the company of your friend tomorrow; the Christian, not tomorrow only, but forever. He does not lose sight of him through the long range of a future existance.

Further; the essential temper of Christianity is self-distrust; and it is the very charm of friendship to love to repose on another's knowledge and affection. The greatest foe of grace is pride; and pride also cannot coexist with generous, undisguised, unqualified affection. Again; it is the object of the gospel to wear off the dissocial points of our character, to unite our conflicting interests and hostile passions, and to endue us with that temper which is not easily provoked and which thinketh no evil. It is also the tendency of our religion to exhaust those sources of jealousy and distrust, which so often embitter our tenderest and dearest connexions. A Christian, knowing his own infirmities, will not expect too much, even from him he loves best. He has none of that pride which takes offence at fancied neglects, and he sees the folly and the sin of requir-

ing from another such an illiberal attachment to himself, as shall confine all his sacrifices to him, and exclude the rest of the world from his attention. It therefore appears to me that to make friendship perfect, Christianity was necessary; because this alone teaches us the sinfulness of wishing for such a monopoly of affection, as is demanded by some narrow minds, and is so contrary to the genius of the gospel.

Why do we see so many ruptures of amity in the circle of our acquaintance? Is it not in many cases from a selfish and excessive jealousy of affection, inconsistent with the true sentiment of benevolence? Still further; the true Christian is the best master of his passions, and thus he avoids a perpetual danger, on which the most ardent minds are apt to fall asunder, and their love to change to aversion. It is a painful thought to fall out by the way, when we have the long path of eternity to travel together.

In fine, where the affection between two minds is not influenced by a sense of a present and all gracious Father in Heaven; where the tomb, when it has closed upon one of them, is thought to have separated them forever; where they have no communion of mind upon the most interesting of human contemplations, God, Jesus, and the life to come; where the all-sanctifying grace of the gospel does not mould their desires, correct and unite their dispositions in humility and christian love, there may be fondness, there may be satisfaction,

there may be partiality, but there is not friendship, such as it existed between Jesus and John; such in fact as that for which Jesus prayed, when he said, 'Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are one.'

My christian friends, if you have found one, who leans on your breast, and you are not afraid that he should listen to the secrets that disturb it; if wisdom and virtue have directed you to him; if ardent love of truth, generous accommodation to each other, fear of God, attachment to his gospel, and hope of everlasting life have bound you together, cherish such a union of minds. The grace of Jesus Christ will temper every desire of your hearts, and mellow your affections by the gentle influences of his gospel. Your interests will more closely intertwine as you draw nearer to the grave, and become more detached from the surrounding distractions of the world, and the tomb, when it closes upon you, shall not separate you, for as God is true, they that sleep in Jesus he will bring with him. Jesus, who once raised a friend from the tomb, will not let it close forever on those who love him, and who love like him.

SERMON XIX.

ON SELF-EXAMINATION.

A DISCOURSE PREACHED ON THE LAST DAY OF THE YEAR.

LUKE, XVI. 2.

GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF THY STEWARDSHIP.

ONCE more a day has arrived which reminds us of the astonishing flight of our time. And of what time? Of that brief space in which is crowded the whole scene of our mortal probation; that momentary space in which is determined the everlasting destiny of man. I tremble when I think that we are now taking an eternal leave of one more of those few years that are allotted to the life of man. Man fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not. Let us employ the fleeting moments of this day in reflecting upon the poverty of human existence, before it escapes and shuts up forever the closing year.

Why is it that the points and bounds of our passing time, when they present themselves, affect us so unpleasantly, and spread such a gloom over our meditations? Is it that we were not aware of the

approach of this last day of another year? No, surely; for every departing week, every setting sun has given us an admonition of this day, and has prepared us for its arrival. Is it because this day informs us how old we are, and that we are so much nearer to the close of life? No, surely; for every other day has told us the same truth, and besides this, who is there but imagines that he has many years to live? No, my friends; it is because this day awakens our sleeping recollection and brings up the story of our lives. It is because this day interrogates us with more than common solemnity, What account can you give of the year that is past? It summons us to look into our characters, our families; to examine the posture of our affairs with regard to the great objects of our existence on earth, and something whispers that all is not right, and that if we can shut our eyes without apprehension, it is no longer without peril. This, this it is, which gives this day its terrors. The sun rises as surely, the face of nature is the same, the provision for our life is as sure and regular as ever; but yet a voice seems to issue from the closing portals of the year, 'Give an account of thy stewardship,' and a secret alarm steals over the mind at the consequences of our delay.

Since, then, we have reached, by God's blessing, so favorable a spot for reflection, let us devote this opportunity to severe self-examination. To assist you in this duty, which, though painful, must not therefore be avoided, allow me to suggest to you

some subjects of inquiry. In doing this, I would not assume the office of an inquisitor, nor even that of a monitor ; but only give some refreshment to your memories, and some direction to your meditations.

In this review of our character and situation we must, if we would do it usefully and effectually, limit ourselves to some definite periods of time, and portions of our conduct. There is nothing more proper than to confine it to the year that is past, and to consider the state of our minds and hearts, our domestic, our social, and our religious condition.

1. In the first place, when we examine the improvement we have made, at any time, in mind and disposition, there presents itself to our view a meagre account of our mental treasures, and an humbling sense of our defects of temper. Do we find that we have supplied during the last year the chasms and vacuities of our knowledge, or are we yet as ignorant as ever of many things most important to acquire? Have we set apart a portion of our leisure to the cultivation of our understandings? Have the difficulties, for instance, which have hitherto obstructed our faith, or kept alive our prejudices against Christianity, been honestly examined and fairly removed, or do we remain as ignorant of God and of his gospel, as at any former period? Though many incidents we meet with, arouse a temporary interest in religion, have we taken pains to preserve this interest and to follow

the light which has sometimes darted across our path, or have we sunk back again into the darkness which usually envelopes our meditations? If, on the contrary, while we have increased in years, the memory and the sentiment of the most important truths in religion have been fading away, can we be satisfied with such a state of mind, even though on other subjects we may have learnt much, and have added to our experience in politics, literature, and the conduct of life? The subjects relating to our religion and to our duties, are vast and impressive, and they cannot be learnt at a glance. Let us not go through another year in all the presumptuousness of ignorance; upon subjects, too, which in a single hour may burst upon our unprepared minds with all the terrible certainty of another life.

Again; can we discover during the last year any melioration of our tempers, and any improvement of our habits? We have formerly suffered much sordid attachment to wealth. Are we disengaged from this slavery? We have sometimes felt the stings of envy, and the troubles of vanity, peevishness, and discontent. Are we yet free from these miserable tormentors, or are we at this moment suffering as much as ever from envy, pride, disappointment, and unsatisfied desires? Are the resentments which we once felt, at last extinguished; and has the coldness which we have indulged towards some men, given place to more cordial sentiments? The thought of death has perhaps

occurred to us often as we have grown older. Do we look forward to it with more tranquillity, or are we still putting far away the evil day, afraid to think of it, and trembling lest it should arrest us in the midst of a life of acknowledged sinfulness? God has continued us another year. But have we broken off those doubtful habits which our consciences did not approve, or have we this year begun those habits of personal religion, which we have before neglected, or renewed and invigorated those which have been omitted? If we have not kept up our private devotions, if, by being more immersed in occupation, we have lost sight of God, now is the time to call up these solemn subjects, to repair these alarming defects, and with truly penitent hearts to acknowledge the afflicting truth, that we have fallen off from the only support of our unworthy lives, and to return to him with humiliation and prayer.

2. In the second place, let us examine our domestic character, and see how we have fulfilled, during the last year, this social relation. Far be it from me to indulge an idle curiosity; I would only lead you to look towards that quarter, where you will be likely to make the most important discoveries. Are you satisfied then, with your habits of domestic life? Is a large portion of your leisure faithfully devoted to those parental obligations, for which you must account with God, the great parent, and with the great family of which you are a part? You have sometimes, I doubt

not, resolved with true affection to devote yourselves in earnest to the religious cultivation of the minds of your children. Has this been regularly and seriously undertaken, or have your attentions to them been slight and unproductive of good, because you were soon weary of the task, and finally relinquished, because it seemed burthensome and vexatious? Another year they have lived under your roof; another year has exposed them to new temptations. Have you done anything for them for which they will thank you forever? Is your family a scene of real quiet, of contentment, of intellectual pleasure, of habitual religion? or are your occupations at home frivolous, your pleasures unsparingly introduced, your expenses lavished without rule, your time dissipated without economy, and your home the theatre of foolish and unprofitable occupations, all introduced to banish thought and solitude, and make you forget that you are at home? Do you know the habits your children are forming, the examples they see, the companions they cherish, and the employments in which they engage when they are out of your sight? Have you this year introduced any improvements in your domestic arrangements by which you have supplied former defects and corrected former errors? Is God, the God of your fathers, the God of your children, on whom you depend every hour for your own life, and the lives of those who are dearest to you in the world, is he yet invoked within your walls?

3. In the third place, let us examine our social character. Within the last year the wealth of some of you has perhaps increased, and your means of doing good have of course been extended. Has your bounty also been enlarged? Instead of applying this year your superfluous wealth to the purposes of your avarice or your pleasure, have you devoted it more sacredly than before to higher and more generous purposes? Can you, amid your reflections, repose sweetly on the instances of real good which you have been the means of producing, or does the last year present the miserable blank of a selfish and wordly life?

When we consider, too, how various and frequent, within a single year, are the means of doing good, our memory must reproach us with some omissions which nothing but necessity could excuse. Is no one now suffering from our neglect? Has no one been wounded by our ill treatment, distressed by our carelessness, or seduced by our example? Have we made honest and full reparation for the wrongs which we have either wilfully or inadvertently committed? Have we been reconciled to those with whom we have quarrelled, and are we now at peace with our neighbours and with our own hearts?

Are you satisfied with the last year's discharge of your various social duties, as a citizen, a friend, a professional man, a supporter of the good institutions of society? Have you withheld no one's dues, sacrificed no man's good name, equivocated

in no one's cause, imposed on no one's credulity, stood in the way of no one's happiness? Have you never shrunk from your duty, because it was difficult or dangerous, and drawn back when you might save another from ruin, lest you should expose yourself to censure or to trouble?

Lastly; How stands your religious character? Are you more devotional and heavenly-minded in your dispositions, more truly religious in your habits? When you have attended on the public worship of God, has it been with a more solemn sense of the presence of the great God whom we here approach, or do you still regard it as a practice due only to your sense of decorum, and required by the habits of the community, a practice which you omit when you can? The sense of the obligation of public worship is entirely distinct from the pleasure, which you may happen to receive from a preacher; and you are not to measure your true character as worshippers of God, by the curiosity or any other selfish motive, which may bring you here. Have you taken care to correct any impropriety in your attendance on these duties of prayer and praise to God? For the real character of men's minds will discover itself in many neglects and irregularities, in which a truly serious man will never allow himself, although the world may notwithstanding give him the praise of reputable deportment.

One year more is just going, and with it how many golden opportunities are taking their flight,

and you call after them in vain! Are you satisfied with the religious progress you have made? Of your prayers how many have fallen ineffectual from your lips, and how many, from your wandering habit of mind, have never reached the throne of God? Can you take pleasure in the progress of the divine life in your souls, in the new views that open upon you, in the new hopes that cheer you, in the peace of your hearts in communion with God? You have perhaps had some afflictions; how have you improved them? some disappointments; how have you met them? some new intimations of your own departure from the world; how have they operated upon your thoughts?

Every man must appropriate these inquiries to his own peculiar circumstances. They are hints only, too general to make a deep impression, without our personal attention. Do you call it impertinence in the preacher? The examination must at some time be made, and what opportunity is more favorable than the present? It will be inconceivably dangerous for us to live on from year to year always deferring this scrutiny. Our perplexity will every day increase, our debts will accumulate, and yet the voice, 'Give an account of thy stewardship,' will be heard by every man. And will there be another opportunity? Thou, Lord, only knowest! thou, before whom all nations shall be gathered, and the books must be opened, where every man must read at the same moment his past life and his future destination; at a mo-

ment also, when all our prayers, and all our remorse will not change the solemn account.

The tremendous sum of our unworthiness is not to be just glanced at and forgotten. It cannot, and as God lives, it will not be forgotten, though we should continue to practise, to the end of a long life, this same formality. The sins of this year are added to the last, as those of the last were to those of the preceding. What then is the state of our religious condition? You, who have lived twenty, thirty, forty years, and more in this world of God's, who have been supported by him every moment, who have nothing which you have not received from him, nothing for which you must not account before his presence hereafter, think, I beseech you, of the folly and danger of longer neglecting to acknowledge him, to pray to him, to fear him, to serve him with all the powers which he has given you. If you have never seriously thought of this, think of it now. The ground on which you stand is treacherous; it may in an instant yield and plunge you into an abyss of irrecoverable sorrow. Choose you this day whom you will serve, and presume not that God's mercy will draw out to an indefinite length, your quivering thread of life. You that have thought the wonderful gift of his Son Jesus, unworthy of your attention, let not the new year begin without finding you approaching this merciful Saviour. 'And when he was a great way off his father saw him, and had compassion on him.'

Those of you, who, with a sincere faith in the gospel of Jesus, and with a general conviction of your duty to live to his honor, have discovered this year great defects in your services, and who feel oppressed with a sense of the little progress you have made, come, and let us now determine with full purpose of heart, on what!—Ah! the vast field of duty is so immense! and yet if God be for us who can defeat us? Let us resolve then upon a more faithful cultivation of our minds, more serious reading and less amusement, more thought and less vanity, more serious inquiry after truth and less vain speculation. Let us sacredly, unreservedly, and in opposition to all the sneers of the profligate part of the world, resolve before God to devote this holy time to the instruction of our families, and of ourselves too, if we have not yet begun it. Let no plea of business or of pleasure prevent this employment of our Sundays' leisure. Mark out for yourselves, and for your children, a course of religious instruction, and in the fear and love of God, commence the great duty of prayer, and persevere in it to the end.

Determine that you will this year look around you to discover where you may retrench your unprofitable expenses upon mere vanities and pleasures. Let not the means of doing good accumulate upon you, only to increase the weight of your condemnation, as if you were enriched only to swell an enormous treasure, or to fill a greater space in the eyes of an envious world. Be con-

tinually on your guard against that hardness of heart, which constant attention to the secular employments of life is sure to produce. Look out for objects of bounty and for channels of beneficence. Never imagine that you have done your duty while there is a single want of body or mind to which you can have access, unrelieved. Resolve to relinquish at once any habits in your domestic or public life, of which your conscience gives you a doubt of the innocence. Break off with all the prudence in your power any ensnaring connexions, any unworthy and dangerous friendships. Let not a false shame prevent you for a single day, from giving up any modes of life, which, however popular or reputable, are inconsistent with the life of a serious Christian. Decidedly and instantly oppose any private practices which are not perfectly reconcilable with the laws of God, and with domestic peace and purity; and take your firm stand against the introduction of any public amusements by which the order and good habits of society may be unhappily affected.

Let not the old excuses be again brought forward to justify you in the neglect of institutions which you acknowledge to be useful, and which you believe to be the command of God. Reform whatever there is to be reformed in your attendance on public worship, and in your observance of the exercises of religion.

Let us begin the year with an humble and penitent acknowledgment of our sins, defects, and

degeneracies, and pray to God for pardon. Let us set out, with confidence in his aid, upon a new career of more effective obedience. We cannot, it is true, resolve upon everything at once, our deficiencies and sins are too numerous to be reformed by one act of solemn determination; but we can all fix upon some portion of character and conduct, and thither bend our resolution; and at least we can all resolve to relinquish any evil habit which we are conscious of indulging. Though it is dangerous to promise much that we will do, we can all determine before God and our hearts, what we will abandon.

But, my friends, what have I been recommending! Resolutions for another year, for the rest of life, when it may be, that some of us shall not see another day; many of us, not another year! I wonder at the temerity, the confidence of man! Spare us, good Lord! Cut us not off in the midst of our days. Give us another year that we may repent and serve thee better.

SERMON XX.

SOURCES OF THE COMMON MISAPPREHENSIONS OF GOD.

PSALMS, L. 21.

THOU THOUGHTEST THAT I WAS ALTOGETHER SUCH AN ONE AS THYSELF.

RELIGION, as far as it is in any way distinct from morals, has reference to God. If there were no God at the head of the universe, there could be no religion, because it is implied in every definition which can be given of a religious man, that his conduct is governed by his sense of God's approbation. Of course, as far as the characters of men differ who believe in the existence of such a supreme being, the different ideas which they entertain of this being must lie at the root of the diversities in their characters. Hence, if you follow men up to their most secret persuasions, you will find that their notions of God's character are variously modified. If we all conceived of it exactly alike, it would be impossible that such varieties should exist in our speculations and practice. It becomes, therefore, to every man, a subject of im-

portant inquiry, whether he has not in some manner figured to his own mind a being like himself, and placed him at the head of the universe, instead of the unchangeable and perfect Jehovah.

It is true that the only ideas which we can form of the moral perfections of God, must be originally derived from our conceptions of these qualities as we find them in human nature; that is, in ourselves and others. Hence it follows that every man's notions on this subject, will be more or less accurate, according to the purity and truth of his moral ideas and sentiments. For it is only by exalting to the highest degree of excellence those qualities which we love or approve in men, that we can conceive of God at all, as a good and moral governor. Hence he that has no just conceptions of the true nature of moral excellence, must form unworthy conceptions of God; and hence, too, it naturally follows, that in proportion to the purity of our own minds will be the justness of our thoughts of our Maker. In this view of the subject it may also be said, that every man makes a God for himself, insensibly degrading or dignifying the object of his adoration, according to the cast of his own wishes or character. This is a consideration fraught with the most solemn consequences.

In conformity with these remarks, we find, in the history of the world, the gods of those nations who have had no revelation, fashioned according to the characters of the times and people. In the rude and warlike ages of the world, their gods were

as quarrelsome as themselves. They were indeed little more than a race of stronger men, and the moral ideas of mankind were so few and so imperfect, that strength was the only quality thoroughly understood and really reverenced, even in Divinity. The barbarous nations of the north, ascribed to their supreme divinity the most cruel and blood-thirsty propensities; he was appeased with the scent of human gore, and gratified with the sacrifice of the most innocent victims. As society became more luxurious and effeminate, the gods were also sensualized and enervated, till at last, even in the times of refinement and philosophy, it was thought the greatest perfection and felicity of the Godhead to have no concern with the affairs of this world, but to pass a life of the most senseless inactivity. This was the philosophy of Epicurus.

For these strange misapprehensions of the Deity, there is some excuse in the want of a written revelation, which should fully declare the character of God. The proofs of it which are found in the works of nature, are not easily apprehended by an uncultivated mind. When God was seen only in the clouds and heard in the wind, the clouds often obscured his majesty, and the wind brought only indistinct murmurs of a mighty power. To us there is no such apology; and if we think unworthily of God, it argues some perversion of the mind, in which we cannot be blameless. That eye must be diseased which cannot now see the sun of righteousness travelling in his strength and unclouded in his lustre.

It shall be my object in this discourse to inquire into the sources of the most common misapprehensions of God, and to lead you to examine your own notions on this subject.

I. The first source of misapprehension, is found, where we should least of all expect it, in scripture itself. There are many who form their ideas of their Maker from detached passages of the bible, without consulting the general tenor of the volume. They seize upon particular texts, and dwell on them with a kind of superstitious partiality, as if they were glad to find the picture of a being such as they had feared or fancied. From the texts which proclaim the mercy of God and the extent of the redemption by Jesus, they figure to themselves a God who is all fondness or compassion; who is too gentle to punish, too kind to look with displacency on any of his creatures, how corrupt and wicked soever they may be. Thus they frame, from a few unconnected texts, a system in which God is introduced only to make men happy whether they are fit for it or not, and the awful and pure Majesty of Heaven is changed into a doating and foolish parent.

Others seem to search the scriptures only to find proofs of arbitrary power and irresistible determination in the Deity. To him they ascribe unconditional decrees, and to themselves an invincible fatality of action, which leave them without blame or power or accountability. Destitute of that spirit of devotion which a just sense of our

dependence is calculated to preserve, their notions of God's government are adapted only to excuse themselves in sin, or make them presumptuous in religion. Because God controls their fate, they think that they have nothing to do with it; and though in the business of the world they are as sensible as other men that their condition must depend upon their exertions, in the affairs of religion they are willing to believe that everything is fixed, everything immutable, bound down in the chains of an unrelenting fate, which leaves them without the means to conquer or to fly. 'I am only what God has made me, I must be what he has determined.' But why do they never recollect, that it is his determination that we should be moral beings, placed here for probation, whose condition must depend always upon character? It is only from a strange partiality to individual texts that we see some men reposing in the deceitful dream of an Elysium of universal and unconditional salvation, and others worshipping a God, who looks with complacency upon the eternal and unalterable torments of one half of a race of human creatures, whom he has unconditionally reprobated from the beginning of time.

II. Another source of misapprehension is to be found in the partial views which we take of God's providence. There are men, who, from the very regularity with which the universe proceeds, conclude against the government of a supreme controller. They have seen no miraculous interpo-

sitions, they have witnessed no disturbance of the common course of causes and effects. Hence they conclude that God has never interfered in the quietude of nature, that the story of miracles is a fabrication, and the proofs of revelation the dream of enthusiasts. They see, too, in the world, the judgments of God against the wicked unaccountably delayed, and the happiness of the good strangely interrupted; crimes triumphing in unpunished presumption, and humility and integrity groaning under the persecution of the impious. All things, in their estimation, come alike to all; and if they admit the necessity of a prime mover, they admit an agent who is of little more consequence in the universe than the spring in the movements of a watch, which serves to keep the parts in motion, but which knows not how irregularly the hands may point, or how widely the action of the parts may be disarranged. They fondly imagine that what to them appears confusion would appear so to God, if he observed it, and therefore they would place him out of sight of the scenes and changes of this state of things.

There is another class of men, who judge of the character of God from particular events which happen to themselves or others. Where their thoughts are full of some darling projects, and their zeal influenced by some favorite set of opinions, they exalt themselves into the ministers of God's especial designs, and every unexpected occurrence which favors their plans they fondly call

a special interposition of his providence. They think they see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending to minister to their purposes. They make God a party to their passions, and think he is altogether such an one as themselves. They construe their success into a proof of God's approbation, and pronounce those atheists, who will not discern the steps of God's providence in that little footpath, which their vain imaginations have marked out for him. In short, they would place the Divinity within the little circle of their own society, where he frowns or smiles according to their wishes. Next to the mischief of gross impiety, is the mischief of favoritism; or rather of superstitious pretensions to the interpositions of God's providence.

There are others who judge of God from some particular misfortune which has happened to themselves. Perhaps he has not granted answers to their importunate prayers, and then they think him inexorable, or he has blasted their hopes, and brought them down from the proud eminence of their prosperous circumstances, to dwell in the low, and damp vale of misery. There they see the Divinity through mists; God is regarded with fear, as the sun, in the language of Milton,

> 'Looks through the horizontal misty air,
> And sheds disastrous twilight.'

Then they venture to arraign his goodness, or imbibe unworthy conceptions of his benevolence. They say God has no mercy laid up for them, and they fall into the most distressing

melancholy, or the most dreadful impiety and unconcern. There are also men, who, from a long course of remarkable successes, or from some extraordinary preservations, seem to think that God has given them a pledge of perpetual security. They believe in what they call their fortune; as if their Maker had left them to some tutelary genius, or given them a commission of uninterrupted good fortune. In the enlarged mind of a Christian all these are unworthy conceptions of the Deity. He dares not judge of the character of God from single events, or from any one confined sphere of his operations. He knows these are but parts of his ways; and that a very little portion is heard by man of Him, in whose sight a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

III. A third source of our misapprehension of God is to be found in our own peculiar temperament. The native cast of every man's mind in some degree tinges all his moral qualities, and the same virtues and vices are not precisely alike in any human beings. Hence, according to our predominant tempers, will our ideas of God be modified, and we shall think unworthily of the Divinity, in the same proportion that we mingle in our conceptions of him, the peculiarities of our own affections, passions, and imperfections. For even the best of men must take their notions of the perfection of any moral quality from that form in which it exists, however imperfectly, in their own minds,

and with this individual hue will they transfer it to the character of God. Thus the Ethiopians, it is said, when they would paint their gods in the highest style of beauty, colored them black, simply because it was their own native complexion.

This part of my subject, is, I know, difficult and abstruse. It is almost impossible to define those shades of difference which exist in every man's mind, and affect his notions of justice, mercy, goodness, and wisdom. But as far as these varieties exist, are our best notions of God affected; and perhaps we are not sufficiently on our guard that we do not worship an idol of our imaginations, when we profess to worship the all-perfect and unchangeable Divinity. Thus there are some men whose temperament is melancholy and whose religion comes to them enveloped in a mantle of funereal gloom. They think that God always looks upon the world as they do, on the darkest side; and that he can find nothing on earth to contemplate with complacency. They form to themselves a being, who looks with abhorrence upon those pleasures, which they see with disgust or pity, and thus, with the sincerest intention of honoring Jehovah, place him always in a light in which they only, can contemplate him with advantage. The mild cheerfulness of the nature of others, sometimes leads them to dress the Divinity in smiles. If they are sensible themselves of the purity of God's character, yet they are willing to have in others, the belief that he is only love.

They rejoice in the happiness of God's creation, but they forget that all happiness is not virtue, and that God cannot love those who love not him, nor make any blessed in the enjoyment of himself against their will and ruling passion. They forget that it is hazardous to attribute to God the weakness of their own good nature. They cannot bear to see others unhappy, God cannot endure to see them unworthy of happiness. The disposition of the famous Genevan reformer, that truly great man, was remarkably stern and inflexible. He seemed to believe that God pursued his own glory in the same way and by the same means in which his zeal and haughtiness prompted him to pursue it. Hence the severity of his system, the unrelenting attributes with which he loves to surround his God, and the pleasure with which he continually dwells on the sovereignty of God, an attribute which seems to be in his mind little else than the unqualified power of doing as he pleases. 'Thou thoughtest I was altogether such a one as thyself,' might here be justly objected; and it has been objected, I believe, with considerable effect.

There are other men, of a natural timidity of temper, who never consider God as pleased with a rational and manly piety, but who seem rather to deprecate his displeasure by trifling and superstitious performances, such as could be demanded only by a weak and capricious deity. Their services seem to be offered by way of atonement. They put up their prayers with punctuality, rather

lest God should be offended, than in the spirit of true devotion, and though strictly conscientious in their whole character, they do not seem to have attained to that state of perfect love which casteth out fear. They have not that spirit of adoption by which we may cry, Abba! Father!

IV. A fourth source of our unworthy conceptions of the Deity is to be found in our wicked lusts and corrupt habits. No man, who is the slave of any favorite sin, can remain easy in the apprehension that God regards him with the same disapprobation that he regards himself. Hence he must either accommodate his notions of God to his own standard, or else he must live in perpetual fear and dissatisfaction. It is not doubtful which of these alternatives he will choose. This is the secret of all the atheism in the world. God must be dispossessed of his authority and the world given up to the sport of human crimes, that these men may live securely. Hence, if there are any notions of Deity which seem to favor their irreligion, they easily find arguments in their support, and their understanding is sophisticated by their lusts. They greedily embrace the opinion that God, so pure, so infinite, so almighty as he must be, thinks it unworthy of his majesty to attend to the minutiæ of human conduct. The opinion of a moral government of the world they reject as the fiction of priests. God surely will not disturb the dead silence of the grave to awaken mortals like them to retribution! God surely cannot feel

such an interest in the concerns of this little planet, this atom of creation, as to think it necessary to vindicate the honors of his holiness by making such an insignificant creature as I am, miserable for my sins! Presumptuous man! It is no greater condescension in the Lord of innumerable worlds to stoop to observe your most secret sins, than it is for him to receive the homage of the seraph that stands on the highest step of his throne. The darkest recesses of your lusts are to him as clearly visible as the lightest mansion in heaven. Think, O thou careless man! that if a single sin you have committed were out of his cognisance, the perfection of his government would be as really impaired, as if the crimes of a conqueror were unregarded or a world crushed, and he perceived it not. The disorder of the universe would be as great, if you could go unpunished, as if a Nero or Caligula had escaped his retribution; as if the whole world of nature were unbalanced, and systems rushed together in chaos. And on the other hand, the equity of his government would be as much impaired, if the sigh of a single saint were lost to his ear, his omniscience would be as much limited if a sinner repented and God knew it not, as if a new sun were to break out and he observed not its brightness. It is only in the hope of annihilation that God can be safely disregarded. And even to that vacant gulf a ray of divine power darts in, and it is no longer a void.

I close this subject, then, by offering you the following considerations. Remember, that in proportion to the purity of your own hearts will be the justness of your thoughts of God. The more like God you become, the more—I would say it with reverence—will you enter into his character. And without this conformity of heart and conduct to his will, your knowledge of the Divinity will be nothing but a cold and barren speculation. To what purpose is it that you can enter into all the proofs of his eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, and infinity, or arrange a demonstration of God's attributes with the utmost perspicuity; to what purpose talk of him in language worthy of his greatness, and become eloquent in the praises of Jehovah, if you remain untouched with the moral excellence of his character, if God is not the object of your love, if there exists in your heart a secret disgust at his government, and an aversion to his purity? The mind of such a man is like a cold and empty chamber hung round with the maps and figures of the different parts of the earth, which he has seen and known only in these delineations; regions of which he knows nothing by personal knowledge, where he has no friends, no attachments, no hopes, no ties of interest. If God is not our God, it is of little purpose that we believe that such a being exists. But, my friends, if your hearts are frequently in communion with him, you will have an eternal friend in this awful being. If you can enjoy everything

which you meet as his gift, every creature in existence will furnish you with new proofs of his goodness. God will enter into all your thoughts. No event, however unexpected, will weaken your trust in him. What you cannot now interpret, you will believe contains a kind meaning; what you fear you will fear as a mark of his displeasure, and in no other view; what you suffer, you will suffer as the instrument of his goodness. The changes in the world, and much less the dark and the light aspects of your affairs, will not for a moment give you any misapprehensions of your Maker. The longer you live the more will you acknowledge the equity of his dispensations, and the more humbly will you rely upon his providence.

If, then, you would correct your false notions of God you must be more intimate with him. Live lives of habitual devotion, and your breast will be the temple of the Divinity. He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him. Without this spirit of piety, it seems to me that all our discourses, all our descriptions of Jehovah, and indeed everything relating to religion, must appear to you like the conversation of foreigners, in a language, which, however familiarized to your ear, you do not understand. Without the aid of a devotional spirit, God must be forever a stranger to you. Oh! my friends, let us beware, lest the light which bursts upon the world to come, reveal him to us, not as a stranger only, but as an enemy.

SERMON XXI.

A PURE HEART AND BLAMELESS LIFE MOST FAVORABLE TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL.

JOHN, VII. 17.

IF ANY MAN WILL DO HIS WILL, HE SHALL KNOW OF THE DOCTRINE, WHETHER IT BE OF GOD, OR WHETHER I SPEAK OF MYSELF.

AMID the great variety of existing opinions on the subject of religion in general and of Christianity in particular, this text often becomes the refuge of the weary and distracted mind; and it is also often held out as an encouragement to the youthful inquirer, who is beginning to seek with anxiety for the truth as it is in Jesus. The Christian quotes this text against the infidel, when he is not willing directly to impeach his motives. The theological polemic quotes it against his adversary, when he is himself compelled, by stress of argument, to retreat from his positions and shelter himself in the goodness of his heart, rather than in the strength of his cause. The fanatic quotes it against the man whom he cannot make to feel as he does, and who, he is sure, therefore, will not think with him. And, lastly, the man of real can-

dor quotes it, when, weary of the war of words, disgusted with the spirit of sectarianism and the obscurities of human systems, he seeks repose, for himself and his friends, in this merciful declaration, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.'

The words were addressed by our Saviour to those incredulous Jews, who had heard his public teachings in Jerusalem, at the feast of tabernacles. We learn from the evangelist in this chapter, that there was at this time much dissension among the Jews respecting Jesus. Some said he was a good man; others said nay, and maintained that he seduced the people. For, adds the evangelist, no man, not even the friends of Jesus, openly professed his attachment to him, 'through fear of the Jews.' Then Jesus went up to the temple and taught, that is, in the most public manner. The Jews, who heard him, were astonished at his preaching, and said, Whence hath this man any knowledge of the sacred writings, having never received the usual education? He has had no instruction in the science of the law, to which our doctors are brought up; or, as we should say, he has never received a professional education. The language of our English version, 'How knoweth this man letters, having never learned,' does not in this place give the meaning of the Jews. Their wonder was, that our Saviour should assume the office of a public religious instructer, without hav-

ing been brought up at the feet of some rabbi. Jesus replies to this objection; The doctrine which I deliver is not mine, but His who sent me. If any one will do the will of God, he will know whether this doctrine has God for its author, or whether I speak of myself, and merely on my own authority. He who speaketh of himself, or on his own authority merely, consults his own glory; but he who consults the honor of him who commissions him, is true; a teacher very far removed from any attempt at imposture.

Before we proceed to state and illustrate the doctrine of our text, we have two preliminary remarks to suggest.

In the first place, the text allows us to conclude, that a man without the knowledge of Christianity, or of any other revelation, may yet be disposed to do the will of God. It supposes, that there may exist in the mind a predisposition to religious obedience, or at least a sincerity and ingenuousness of temper which qualifies some minds better than others for instruction. The disposition to which our Saviour makes the promise, is that general disposition of religious obedience, which certainly is not entirely unknown under any dispensation; and which may accompany that knowledge of God, which we are commonly said to derive from the works of creation and the plain deductions of reason. The proffer of the gospel, therefore, presupposes a knowledge of some truths among mankind, and a certain moral character in indivi-

duals either favorable or unfavorable to its reception. Christianity does not profess to give us our primary, much less our only religious notions. Neither does it suppose every man to be utterly averse from all good, and inclined to all evil and that continually, till he comes within its enlightening doctrine and sanctifying influences. It supposes some ground-work in human nature, on which the gospel is to build, some previous moral capacities in a man as necessary to the operation of the gospel motives. It is intended, indeed, to regenerate the human heart; but it also supposes the heart to be already prepared to yield to its regenerating influence. In short, the language of the text implies that we must be inclined to do the will of God, before we can receive the doctrine of Jesus Christ as the truth of God. Of course our disposition to do the will of God cannot depend exclusively on our faith in Christ.

Our second remark is, that the text gives to an honest and serious mind the liberty of judging of the claims, and even of the doctrines of Christ. That is, our Saviour does not profess to bear down the judgments of men as to the truth, either of his pretensions or of his doctrines, by the mere force of his authority. He evidently supposes some previous knowledge of God's will, some original truths, either of reason or of revelation, with which the professed communication from God must not be inconsistent. The text in fact implies, that in every case of revelation we have some standard,

more or less complete, by which we may judge whether the doctrine delivered, or the pretensions made by any one who lays claim to divine authority, are to be admitted. Jesus himself submitted his pretensions to the scrutiny of his cotemporaries, and of course to the scrutiny of all men of sober and candid minds. He authorises the exercise of reason in the case of revelation; not indeed to determine whether there was a necessity for instruction by revelation, for of this God alone can be a competent judge; nor to say that the thing is altogether unnecessary and improbable, and therefore to refuse to listen to the teacher or to examine his pretensions. This very reason requires us to listen, while it allows us to judge of the proofs of the revelation and the conformity of its doctrines to what we before knew of God. It by no means allows us to reject any truths as coming from God, simply because they are new and unknown to us before, or because they are such as we did not discover or should not have expected; but still, these truths, however strange, or unexpected, or ungrateful, must be viewed in the best light we have; and the text supposes that if they are from God, they will certainly commend themselves to the acceptance of every mind that is disposed to do the will of God. It is possible, indeed, to suppose a case, which, however, is not likely to happen under the government of God, in which an honest inquirer may at one and the same time find the external proof of the teacher's au-

thority irresistible, and the doctrines taught irreconcilable to the dictates of his best reason. In such a case the mind must remain in suspense, either suspecting that it has been deceived in its examination of the proofs, or that it does not thoroughly understand the doctrines. And just in this state of indecision, nothing is more consolatory to the honest, or more alarming to the disingenuous, than the words of our text.

We proceed now to the doctrine of the text. To every man, whether he believes Christianity or not, it is highly important. It includes two propositions;

That our religious conviction of the truth of Christianity very much depends on the moral state of our minds;

That a correct knowledge of the doctrines of this religion is promoted by the practice of its laws.

I. To some minds there is nothing more offensive than to hear it maintained, that their indecision or their unbelief on the question of revelation, results from the nature of their habits of life or the prevailing state of their affections. Now, on the other hand, the believer in the gospel does not think it any reproach to his understanding when it is said that his love of God and goodness has biassed him to the reception of Christianity. This is an awkward and yet an unavoidable state of things, and yet it results from the very nature of the christian religion as a moral system.

If Christianity offered men any temporal emoluments or advantages, if it held out any lure to the passions of the believer, we should be more cautious in using this language on the subject of faith; because the believer could never be secure against a retort in kind, which it would be difficult to parry. But when we look at the doctrine of Jesus Christ, presenting itself in all its simplicity and purity, to counteract the influence of the darling objects of temporal ambition, and the darling passions of vain and selfish men; when we regard its threats and promises, all relating to the inner man and the future world; when we find it presenting itself to our examination unsupported except by its historical proofs and its own internal excellency, we feel that Jesus has a right to say, Those who heartily embrace my doctrine, such as it is in the New Testament, must do it from virtuous motives, and those who reject it are under the bias of some moral indisposition.

When we in imagination see the meek and holy Son of God in the presence of his captious and bigoted countrymen, without form or comeliness, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, unrecommended by a single circumstance flattering to the pride or passions of his hearers, and unsupported by anything but the consciousness that God was with him, and appealing to nothing but the proofs of divine power which he exhibited, and the purity of his life and doctrine; when we find him able to promise nothing to his followers on

earth, and threatening them with the afflicting consequences of their rejection of him who would save them from their sins, when we recall this picture of Jesus on earth, who can refuse him the right of saying to the Jews and to all mankind, 'Ye will not come to me that ye may have life. For this is your condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.'

Now, if he could say this with justice to men who had the evidence of their senses to assist their belief, we may be allowed to say it now, when the evidence of the truth of Christianity is even more of a moral kind, than it was in the lifetime of our Saviour and apostles. Do you ask how this is? I answer, that among the first witnesses of the gospel, their faith must have had less of a moral character the more it had of the evidence of the senses to produce it, and the more it was assisted by the personal influence of our Saviour's presence. I do not by this mean to say, that the moral demerit of any particular case of unbelief, may not now be less than in the case of the unbelieving Jews; but only that the moral motives for embracing Christianity have now become almost the only ones that can operate, either in drawing our attention to the subject of revelation, or in affecting our determinations. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.

The doctrine of the text applies with similar force to all just religious belief, from whatever source

derived. We do not admit, indeed, that any religion, worthy of the name, can exist at present without Christianity; and surely there is nothing of value in any other religion, which is not found better in Christianity. Nay, what does the example teach us of men in christian countries who renounce their Christianity? Do we not find that when their Christianity is abjured all their religion goes with it? The religious principle, if not extinct, becomes ineffectual, and everything in morals and belief is left loose and powerless in their minds. The present age is full of examples, some of them indeed on a broad and national scale, which ought to teach us the full force of the disciples' exclamation, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.'

Still, however, the unbeliever has a right to demand of us to explain, how it is that virtue and vice have this operation on belief. He will say, 'There is no such mutual influence of belief and practice as you imagine; for practice is dependent on the will, opinion is not; character is voluntary, belief is necessary; belief, therefore, must always follow the nature of evidence and the force of demonstration. It is an act of the understanding, which moral motives cannot or ought not to affect.'

To all this reasoning, which seems so fair, we will not yet oppose the immense multitude of facts within every one's observation, where we are in the habit of charging men every day with the ef-

fect of their hopes or fears, their disposition and wishes, on their opinions; but will content ourselves with this general remark, that, whatever may be the truths, facts, or opinions which are of a nature to influence the temper and practice, it is not unnatural to suppose, nay, it unavoidably follows, that the previous temper or character or practice has an influence on the view which we take of the evidence of such truths or facts. Now, that Christianity is a truth, fact, or opinion of this kind, no one can pretend to deny; and as it regards the mere explanation of this well known phenomenon of the human mind, of the reciprocal influence of belief and practice, it is quite as difficult to explain how opinions should influence character as how character should influence opinions.

But let us attend to this subject more minutely. Here is a young man, tempted to some unlawful indulgence. The question of the truth of religion, that is, of the christian religion, occurs to his mind in these circumstances. He knows, perhaps, or he has heard of the doubts of others, whose powers of mind he has reason to respect. In the mean time, he is called to decide whether he shall, from considerations of religion, give up the offered pleasure. On the one hand he is pressed by a strong temptation; he must decide or the opportunity of sin is gone. He decides, then; what? not that religion is absolutely false—no, this is not necessary for the occasion—but that it is so doubtful as not to be a reason with him for

giving up this indulgence, which may perhaps never again fall within his reach. Now it is not necessary to say how unfavorable must be the effect of this single determination on his mind, whenever he comes to reflect afterwards in cooler moments on the subject of religion. But let such deliberations and such judgments be often repeated, and must they not leave in the mind a settled persuasion against religion, and of course against the consideration of it? They have the same effect on the mind, which they would have if made in more favorable circumstances, whereas in truth they are made in the most unfavorable, that is, under the pressure of a present temptation. As this process, which we have described, takes place when the restraints of religion are most galling, and at the very time of determining on the act of sin, it is easy to see, that this balancing of reasons, and this occasional rejection, will often be tacit and not express. The conclusion, though not expressly drawn, is yet adopted; and as it is practically adopted, and we act upon this hasty decision, it alienates the mind as surely and as effectually from religion, as if we had formally reasoned ourselves into a conviction of its uncertainty or falsehood.

It should be further remembered, that it is the tendency of some habits, especially those of sensuality and licentiousness, to weaken the powers of the understanding, while they thoroughly corrupt the heart. The mind, which is under the domin-

ion of lust, acquires a total inaptitude to religious considerations. And where this kind of depravity does not exist, yet is every species of immoral habit unfriendly to the production of religious faith. A man in such circumstances is always ready to magnify small difficulties, to seize at petty cavils, and to lay hold of arguments, which fall in with the course of his vicious propensities. In short, the operation of moral character upon speculative belief, is a process, which, however difficult it may be in particular cases to detect, is yet in some degree understood by every man, and is frequently acknowleged by those who have undergone any considerable change of religious opinion.

If now we are called upon to show, on the other hand, how virtue produces belief in Christianity, or in Jesus Christ as the messenger of God, speaking with God's authority, it might be enough, perhaps, to answer, that it leaves the mind free from the weight of prejudice, and unaffected by the unfavorable biasses, which we have just now been describing. But it has also a more direct influence. For much of the evidence of the gospel is internal. It is addressed to the moral feelings of the human heart; and every degree of proficiency in virtue, makes us not only think more, but more highly of Christianity, whether we yet believe in it or not. The discourses of Christ and the writings of the apostles breathe such an unction of goodness, that they leave an impression on the mind of a good man, which is more effectual,

perhaps, in producing religious conviction than any historical evidence, while, at the same time, it disposes him to receive without cavil the historical testimony, and corroborates the external proofs. In fine, every man placed within the reach of information, and who will do the will of God, lays hold of that branch of the evidence of Christianity best suited to his habits of thinking, and comes at last to believe, that the doctrine of Jesus Christ is the doctrine of God. It is indeed a process through which the understanding imperceptibly passes; and though many believe and yet sin, and many disbelieve from other causes beside immorality and irreligion, yet the tendency of virtue to faith, and of vice to infidelity, must be admitted as the general rule; and so common is it that we may be thought to have spent too much time in illustration of our Saviour's plain declaration.

II. There remains another view of our subject peculiarly interesting to us, as Christians, who have taken the words of Christ and of his apostles as the source and standard of our religious belief. The declaration in the text, then, authorises us to believe, in the second place, that he who will do the will of God shall not only know all that is essential in Christianity, but that he who practices this religion most faithfully will understand it best.

Now this could never be truly said, if Christianity were a system of curious and difficult

truths; if it were that incomprehensible thing, which it is sometimes made in the language of men. Indeed this could not be true, if all that is in it necessary to salvation were not either plain or practical. If the knowledge of Christianity consisted in the knowledge of those subtle distinctions, which have exercised the understandings of theological disputants, or if it depended on the settlement of the meaning of certain difficult texts, the sense of which can be known and vindicated only by the learned, or if it required any peculiar comprehension of mind to receive correctly its essential and distinguishing dogmas, our Saviour never could have said, that a mere disposition to do the will of God would qualify a man to understand his religion. But this our Saviour has asserted. For it would be trifling or impious to suppose, that our Saviour meant only, 'If you will do the will of God, you shall know that my doctrine comes from God,' while at the same time he secretly knew that the same disposition, without some uncommon comprehension or acuteness of mind, would not enable them to understand his doctrine, and judge of its character and importance, so far as it concerned themselves. This would be in fact to say, 'You may know, that I speak the truth, while you shall not be able to understand me.'

If, then, we attempt to analyse this process of mind as we did the other, and inquire how it comes to pass, that a disposition to do the will of God

enables us to understand the gospel as well as to believe in its divine origin, we shall be compelled to come to this conclusion, that a good disposition can give us no aid in judging of the truth of doctrines except so far as they are practical; of course we have every reason to conclude, that everything essential in Christianity is a practical truth. A temper of obedience to God's will, however excellent in itself, will give us no aid on many of the topics of theological discussion. How can the best disposition in the world help us, for instance, to conceive of the distinction between person and substance in the trinity; between imputed or original righteousness or sin; between natural and moral inability? The best disposition in the world gives us no light on the subject of personal identity and the resurrection of the same body, no clearer conception of the distinction between common and special grace, or justification by faith alone and not by that faith which is alone, as polemics talk. It leaves us as much in the dark as ever on many other topics yet disputed among Christians, and it may very well be doubted, whether the most holy life, and the most frequent supplications for divine illumination would give the bewildered Christian much help in understanding these and many more distinctions, which might be enumerated.

But would you know how the love and practice of virtue lead to the right understanding of the gospel, take up the New Testament and open your

mind to the devout, holy, and benevolent spirit, which breathes in the discourses of our Lord and his apostles. The truths, which effectually and permanently influence practice, are few, but they are often repeated. Like everything great they are as simple and plain as they are important. The instructions and precepts of our Lord appear to those who are desirous of instruction, altogether excellent and worthy to be observed. The doctrines which are according to godliness, are best understood by a godly man.

For instance; there are some of the precepts of our Lord, which, in the eyes of the world, appear doubtful and unreasonable. The good man, who would know whether they are really excellent and worthy of God, makes the experiment of them in his own conduct. Thus he finds that it is true wisdom to forgive rather than to resent, and that it is much more easy to be humble than to be vain; and thus he understands the christian doctrine of forgiveness and humility. He finds by experience the folly of unreasonable anxiety, the vanity of earthly attachments and pursuits, and how much better it is to trust in the Lord, than to lean to our own understandings, and thus comprehends the doctrines of providence and of faith. He is brought down by affliction, and understands the doctrine of the life to come, and every day which revives his self-examination and repentance, makes him sensible of the worth of the doctrine of pardon brought by Jesus Christ.

As he reads the scriptures with a pure and honest intention, not only do the grace and glory of our Saviour's character open more and more upon his mind, but he also feels the force and discerns the divine origin of our Saviour's teaching. The rays of christian truth, like the light of heaven, fall most abundantly on the eye that is directed upwards. As his mind is free from that exclusive attachment to particular systems, by which many ingenuous intellects are cramped or reduced, and as he regards religious truth only in its relation to practice, it is enough for him to find that a particular explication of a theological point is not of any moral value, to believe that it may safely be disregarded as no part of the revelation of God.

There is, then, this further account to be given of the superior knowledge of a good man in all the essential truths of Christianity, that he reads the scriptures with impartiality, honestly desirous of ascertaining what the Lord God would have him to do. It is previously to be expected, that he who is most desirous of obeying and of imitating God, will be most likely to ascertain those truths which really bear the true stamp of divinity. If we once admit, then, that Christianity is a religion for practice, and that a good man is not infallible in the interpretation of every part of scripture, it follows, that, to answer the promise in the text, it must be, that those mistakes into which it is possible for a good man to fall, relate to subjects which do not belong to the essence of Christianity.

Further, if we believe in the good providence of God, extending to all mind as well as to matter, or in the real though imperceptible aid of his spirit, we cannot doubt, that he who ingenuously seeks and diligently obeys the truth as far as he discovers it, will be ultimately led into every necessary article of faith. 'The meek thou wilt guide in judgment; the meek thou wilt teach thy way.' He who is willing to learn, is commonly taught; and he who is disposed to obey God, may depend upon it, that he does not break any of God's commandments by disbelieving a doctrine which he cannot find in the instructions of Christ and his apostles. On the other hand, let it not be forgotten, that obscurity and incapacity of mind are infallibly promoted by the prevalence of unworthy passions and the force of sinful habits. As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, says the apostle, God gave them up to an undiscerning and injudicious mind; and when speaking of the corruptions which should find their way into the christian church, the same apostle says, the man of sin shall come with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

Once more; if we believe the words of our Saviour in the text, it is fair to conclude, that every man who will do the will of God is much more sure of the truth by his diligent study of the scriptures in general, or even of the words of Christ, than he can be made by any of the declarations of a

church professing itself infallible, or by any of the compends of doctrines framed by art and man's device. Of course, then, it should never give a pious and humble mind a moment's uneasiness that it cannot bring its faith to any one of the popular standards; for if the truths which we firmly believe, are fewer than are required by the impositions of men, yet if our creed is the result of a fair and rational study of the scriptures, unbiassed, as we can perceive, by any improper considerations—the man who is conscious, I say, of this state of mind, need be under no alarm for the salvation of his soul as far as belief can affect his salvation. His great anxiety should be to act up to the light he has received, and faithfully to fulfil the extent of his duties; for such, God be thanked! is the intimate connexion of all doctrines and duties, that the man who religiously fulfils one branch of knowledge or practice, will have gone very far to the observance of the whole.

I will conclude the subject with a simple recapitulation of those conclusions which our text has suggested to us.

We have concluded, then, that a man may be seriously disposed to do the will of God, before he has had knowledge of the christian revelation, and of course, there is something in human nature on which Christianity may be built. We have seen also, that the truth of his claims and the nature of his doctrines are submitted by our Saviour himself to the judgment of unperverted reason.

We have seen how virtue produces belief, and vice unbelief in the authority of Christ or in the christian revelation, and we know that he who best practises Christianity will best understand it; and that all the truth which is essential in Christianity is that which a mind disposed to do the will of God cannot fail to receive by the study of the scriptures. God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge; and may God grant that the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may understand what is the excellency of the knowledge of the glory of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

SERMON XXII.

THE DISAPPOINTMENTS AND UNCERTAINTIES OF LIFE.

ECCLESIASTES, I. 14.

I HAVE SEEN ALL THE WORKS THAT ARE DONE UNDER THE SUN; AND BEHOLD ALL IS VANITY AND VEXATION OF SPIRIT.

THERE are some maxims of practical morality, which are so common and so familiar to every man's experience, that it seems idle to tell what every one knows, and superfluous to prove what it is impossible to doubt. But the effect of moral maxims is produced, rather by placing them in new and striking aspects. Among those truths, which all men believe, but which few practically feel, may be mentioned the utter uncertainty of human life and all its expectations and enjoyments. The experiments which prove this fact, have been making ever since the world was made; and not an individual has entered on the stage of life and passed through the common career of worldly probation, who has not been sooner or later willing to confess with Solomon, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'

There is a spirit of dissatisfaction pervading this whole book of Ecclesiastes, from which our text is taken, which renders the perusal of it painful and melancholy. The royal author, in the course of his luxurious life, had drained every source of pleasure, till satiety had succeeded enjoyment. He had decked himself in every flower that grew by the walks of life, and worn them till their colors had faded, and their perfume had been exhaled. He had intoxicated himself with every variety of sensual gratification, till awaking at last from his dream of delight, he found himself sick at heart, and his spirits sunk within him to a stagnant level of discontent.

Solomon, indeed, was now suffering the misery of disappointment. He had been disappointed, not of obtaining the means of enjoyment in any particular instance, but he was blasted with excess of pleasure. He had collected around him all the means and appendages of enjoyment, but the substance had escaped him. The ingenuity and the patience of his servants had been exhausted in contrivances of new pleasures for the monarch. He had tried mirth, and it was mad; wine and it was folly. 'I made me,' says he, 'great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards; I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit; I made me pools of water; I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle, above

all that were in Jerusalem before me; I gathered me also silver and gold, the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got me men and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on all the labor that I had labored to do, and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.'

And this man, who had but to wish, and the means of enjoyment were collected around him, who but stretched out his hand, and pleasures dropped into it; this great monarch found, after all, that in point of actual happiness, the difference was but trifling between him who obtained all, and him who obtained nothing of what he desired on earth.

It may not be unprofitable to employ a short portion of our time in contemplating the disappointments and uncertainties of our life on earth, that we may learn something more of the great art of contentment, and limit our expectations on this side the grave.

We will consider, first, the disappointment of early hopes and expectations, and secondly, the uncertainty of life and its actual enjoyments.

I. The disappointment of early expectations.

When the curtain of life is first drawn up, a thousand incompatible objects of pleasure strike the eye of the inexperienced spectator, and he forms at once a thousand inconsistent wishes and

impatient desires. He takes all the show of happiness, also, for reality, and as objects of pleasure first present themselves to him, he discovers nothing but their beautiful colors, and till he has grasped them he does not suspect that they have a sting.

There are some men who seem born into a world made on purpose to receive them. As they grow up into life, all about them is softness and security. If they fall, they fall upon down; when they stand, they lean upon the arms of affection; they seem to have nothing to do but to gather the rosebuds before they wither, for all the delights of life are provided to their hands. Send one of these favorites of fortune out into the world to expatiate in the fulness of pleasure. Let him not know miscarriages. Let tomorrow be with him as this day and even more abundant. Yet all the expectations of this favorite child of luxury are utterly defeated. And how is this? He finds, that he has lived too fast. In a few years he has exhausted the pleasures which might have been economically diffused through three score years and ten; and he retires, sick of that entertainment of life, which others are just beginning to taste, and cries out, 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.'

If such is the fate of those who seem born to set trouble at defiance, what shall we say of the vast number who struggle to reach those gifts of Providence, from which, by their situation in life, they are placed at a distance? We find some men

laboring for comfortable establishments in life, and we see not why their chance of success is not originally as good as that of other competitors for this world's goods. But unforeseen accidents cross their plans. Sometimes their imprudence, sometimes their neglect, sometimes their very honesty defeats them; and from some strange defect, they toil without profit, and every new attempt to rise only serves to sink them lower.

The competitors for honor are yet more exposed to disappointment; and even the fond hope of useful distinction and mental influence, is extremely delusive and uncertain. Opportunities of improvement which we had anticipated, never present themselves; and the long expected leisure for study retreats before us, like the horizon. Sometimes our early labors are lost because misdirected. Sometimes our intellectual treasures, by a total revolution in public sentiment, are rendered useless. Perhaps the faculties of the mind are prematurely worn out by excessive exertion, the mind itself crushed by its own acquisitions, and left without memory and without judgment, a prey to all the miseries of a wandering imagination. Perhaps—but why should I multiply conjectures to swell the list of disappointments? Why should I search for the chances of failure, when, even if you should succeed in all your worldly projects and in every single object of your wishes, you will find at last, that happiness is not here?

But it is not the expectations of the young only that are so fallacious. We find the infirmities of old age assailing men, while they are projecting plans for many distant years. After having given up the bustle of active life, and while expecting to enjoy the quiet pleasures of an old age spent in the society of children and friends, the senses begin to fail us, we can hardly distinguish the countenances that once gave us pleasure, our dull hearing refuses to distinguish the voices that we love, and we grow tiresome to those who are willing to amuse us. Sometimes the very children on whom we relied for the comfort of our declining years, prove our severest afflictions. They are unfortunate, and the aged parent is involved in their disasters; they are vicious, and he is left to weep over them. Or, if such great evils as these are by God's good providence averted, yet the recollection of the daily diminishing sum of our pleasures, and the perpetually intruding thought of living beyond the wishes of those around us, of filling places which others are waiting to occupy, are sufficient to teach us, that the season of hope ought to be over with us, and that nothing remains but to suffer, since we can no longer act, for 'by faith and patience we may yet hope to inherit the promises.'

In contemplating these disappointments, we can hardly refrain from complaint and despondency. Two considerations have suggested themselves to my mind which serve to account for this state of things, and to condemn our repinings.

The first is, that the inconsistency of our pursuits and expectations is the chief cause of our disappointment. It is of the utmost consequence that we should attain to just notions of the human mind, and not vex ourselves with fruitless wishes, and give way to groundless and unreasonable discontent upon the non-attainment of incompatible pleasures. The child of fortune, if he chooses to exhaust all his sources of pleasure at once, has no reason to complain that he does not afterwards enjoy the benefit of novelty or variety. He must not suppose, that he can partake, at the same time, the ease of the man who has everything provided for him without labor, and the sweet satisfaction that follows the success of toil and the conquest of difficulties. And if he chooses to waste in a few years the pleasures which might be economically distributed through a long life, he must not complain that he at length suffers the misery of having nothing to enjoy.

But you complain that you are disappointed in the attainment of those very things which belong to your course of life. But what is the reason? You have attempted to unite incompatible advantages. You have wished to attain extent and depth of acquirements, professional distinction and general literature, taste amid the drudgery of learned labor, public consequence and the private acquisition of rare and curious knowledge. You have no right to complain that you cannot join together inconsistent acquisitions.

The man of stern virtue suffers. He is persecuted, he is banished, he is forgotten; or he is unknown, he is reduced to want, or he is always struggling with poverty. All this he might have saved with the sacrifice of his honor, his integrity, his faith, or his religion. But why should he murmur, while he retains that, which he acknowledges to be better than all other advantages?

The old man must not complain of disappointment, because he cannot enjoy in age, the pleasures of youth. It is impossible to have at the same time the satisfaction of looking back upon a life that is past, and the anticipation of many years to come. But your wealth, you say, does not reward you, now, when you most expected to enjoy it. Be content with the satisfaction you had in acquiring it. Your children, on whom you have bestowed so much affection and indulgence, pierce your heart through with many sorrows. But if you would not submit to the pain of correcting them, to the labor of giving them principles of virtue and religion; and if, to spare them and yourself from trouble, you left them to themselves, be not surprised that you must now suffer from this neglect. But you see nothing in the world to come which gives you consolation. Ah! this is the natural consequence of having put off the thoughts of it till these last moments. Be not surprised that you cannot reconcile these incompatibilities. You have had what you sought supremely on earth; do not think it strange that you have no treasures in heaven.

Beside the want of moderation and consistency in our expectations, another cause of the disappointment of early hopes, is to be ascribed to the folly of our choice, and the unsatisfactory nature of the objects of human pursuit in themselves. If we will not submit to be instructed by the experience of ages, we must make the experiment for ourselves, and have no right to complain of disappointment. It is unquestionably certain, that no real and permanent satisfaction is to be found, except in the favor of God, and the hope of another life, founded in virtue, integrity, and piety. But you have chosen wealth, rather than virtue. If, after enjoying it, you are satisfied of its incompetency to your happiness, though you may have suffered thereby a great disappointment, it is an invaluable lesson, and the discovery is an ample recompense. You have tried sensual pleasures. They have wounded you deeply; but you have no right to complain, no, not even if God should not afford you time to profit from your dear-bought experience. You have enjoyed all the honors, which men could bestow upon you, and now you are disgusted, and sick of your elevation. Is this the fault of your Creator? You have lived only for yourself, in a selfish, narrow sphere. Are you to complain that you have no friends, and that you are destitute of that peace and harmony of mind which belong to the active, the pious, and the generous? The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof. You would not listen to the word

of God, and the lessons of experience; if you have found out your mistake, make haste to retrieve it, and if it be not too late, try the pleasures of religion and active virtue, and you will not be disappointed.

II. We proposed, in the second place, to consider those real goods which we actually possess, and the uncertainty of life itself.

There are few men who do not possess some real advantage peculiar to themselves, in which they would be losers in changing conditions with others. Some are in possession of firm health, some of a cheerful disposition. Some are happy in the abundance of their friends, others in being free from enemies. Every man has some peculiarity of good fortune, as we call it, of which he is willing to be proud, and others to be envious. It seems superfluous to illustrate the assertion, that the best of these possessions are precarious, and I have nothing to do but to appeal to the common experience of all.

There have been those whom you have loved, in the full enjoyment of health, that real blessing; whose breasts were full of milk, and whose bones were moistened with marrow; whose eye was beaming with lustre, and whose muscles were full of strength. You have left them a few short years. On your return, you have hardly known their emaciated features, you could not recognise their tottering steps and feeble voices. 'When God with rebukes doth chasten man, he maketh his beauty to consume away like a moth.'

You have seen those to whom misfortune might look up as to objects whom she could not reach, and even envy had acquiesced in their greatness and security. In a moment you have seen them brought down to the common crowd of the dependent and the miserable. You have seen men in the full enjoyment of reputation, carried along with the gale of popular favor in the sight of admiring spectators. In an instant it dies away; their full blown honors sink, and they are heard of no more. The distinction founded on genius and learning seems at first to promise greater security. The changes and shocks of matter, cannot, you think, reach the mind. Oh! would it were so. Yet we have all seen the memory lose its power, and the senses that minister to it, decay, and the fancy quenched in the sorrows of age. A sudden attack of disease, in the very strength and vigor of our faculties, deranges all the fine structure of the mind, and fatuity occupies the seat where genius was enthroned.

You have seen the instability of friendship and the loss of the dearest social pleasures. It is the condition on which we are allowed to make friends, that we should be willing to part with them. Sometimes we lose their support before they leave us. The arm on which we have long leaned, suddenly withers, and we are obliged to become supporters in our turn. Sometimes the love of many years is lost by a misunderstanding, which our ingenuity finds it impossible to explain, or our meek-

ness to reconcile. And who of you has not found, that, when you have had the happiness to travel on towards the close of life with the friend of your youth, or the children of your hopes, the grave parts you at last—and you have felt that affliction the hardest to support, which you ought to have been all your life preparing to bear? After all this, need I prove to you the uncertainty of life? I ask you to think only how many you have followed to the grave. Consider how large a portion of that intelligence, which is daily poured in upon us to gratify the natural curiosity of the mind, consists of the narrations of death; and the death, too, not of those who have reached the common term of human life, not of those who have died gently and peaceably in their beds, not of those who have sunk to the grave with unperceived decay, but deaths, sudden, violent, unexpected, every one of which invites us to look at ourselves and ask, Why was that man taken while I am left? 'O God, have mercy on the generations of men, for they are passing away.'

But is there then nothing permanent on earth? My friends, I know of nothing in the universe permanent, but God. God is from everlasting to everlasting, and no man is secure but he who loves God, and is loved by him. Can you for a moment think, that this precariousness is too great, when you see how confidently and immoderately attached so many yet are to these transitory possessions, and to a delusion, yet existing and increasing,

which all these admonitions cannot cure? Can you think this uncertainty too great, when you see how proud men are of their short-lived acquisitions, how vain of their precarious accomplishments, how envious of another's flourishing wealth, how discontented with their lot, how unprepared for changes and reverses, how much afraid to die? Is it for us to complain of the condition of our existence, when it has yet taught us so little confidence in God, the only rock of trust; when we have yet to learn that there is but one possession which is eternal, and that is virtue; one source of happiness which disappointment and death cannot reach, and that is the favor of God?

Do you say, that the picture which we have given of human life, so full of disappointment and uncertainty, is too discouraging? True, my friends, it may be the dark side, but it is not therefore the less true, and it may be of great use occasionally to contemplate it.

Finally; if it be asked, why is all this uncertainty permitted under the government of a benevolent and unchangeable Being, the only answer is, that the present state can only be considered as a state of probation. The most gay and thoughtless creature, when he looks out upon the state of mankind, cannot avoid the conclusion, that the world is not upon the whole a place of happiness. There is too much misery everywhere in view, and more which is out of the sight of him who will not look for it, to allow us the belief that God intended man

for happiness here, or that he has placed us in a state of reward. Nay, every man's own heart answers the question for himself, and at the same time suggests the suspicion, that the answer is not very different throughout the world. And besides this answer of every man's own experience, when he finds, from the observation of past ages, how much of pain, sorrow, disease, and disappointment, has always attended mankind and seems inseparable from their nature, the conclusion is as strong, that this world was not intended to be, as that it is not, a place of absolute happiness; for if this was the intention, it has been universally defeated.

On the other hand, it is not a place of misery. The evil that exists, does not appear to be the object of contrivance. On the contrary, everything we see, tends to counteract and correct the misery which actually exists. If this were really the place of punishment for a fallen race, there is an extraordinary want of contrivance in the tendencies to pain, and in the distribution of suffering. If God were really punishing us here, would he have given us so many hopes, anticipations, and actual delights, as well as alleviations? If he had intended to make us miserable, could he have made this life a blessing in the opinion of so many—which opinion is happiness—a blessing which it is so very hard to relinquish? Nor could he have endowed creatures whom he was punishing, with that wonderful part of their constitution, the pow-

er of habit, which infallibly diminishes evils by their continuance.

It is, if possible, still more clear, that this world is not a state of retribution. In the language of Solomon, 'all things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked;' and in the distribution of good and evil, there is no proportion exactly observed between ill desert and punishment, good desert and reward. So different is it from a state of equitable retribution, that one of the principal sources of the strong desire, the fond hope, the longing after another state, arises from the persuasion that some kind of retribution is just commencing in some cases, but left very imperfect in all, so that some other state must be admitted for the accomplishment of God's equitable intentions, otherwise all that we have discovered is not merely imperfect, but superfluous, unsatisfactory, and purely embarrassing.

There remains, therefore, but one answer to our question, which is, that ours is a state of probation. By this we mean that it is a state of trial and discipline, preparatory to something further; a state in which moral agents are to be formed to active and passive virtue, and in which moral qualities are to be produced, exercised, and matured, with a view to some future condition. This account of human life, is the only one which can be reconciled with the appearances of the world; the only one which either answers or silences the captious and curious inquiries, which are perpetually

recurring to the mind of man, with relation to the government and goodness of God. For when it is once understood, that the present is only a great theatre of preparation or of trial, it is folly to ask Why was there not less uncertainty and disappointment, because it is just as easy and rational to ask, Why was there not more? If you assert that less would have been sufficient to answer every purpose of probation and moral discipline, I may ask, How much less? And why may not beings placed in a condition less probationary than ours, inquire with equal reason, Why were we not created more provident, more secure, more perfect, and more exalted?

My christian friends, after this view of human life, can you think this your abiding place? Have you found here enough to satisfy the desires of souls immortal like your own? No, I cannot consent to place you with the beasts that perish. I cannot endure that you should think the miseries and disappointments, the doubts and vicissitudes, or even the enjoyments of this life, are all that belongs to the existence, of which God has put you in possession. Go to the gospel of his Son. Man there appears a more glorious creature, the child of an everlasting Father in Heaven, who gave his Son to die that he might live forever. Make that your guide through these disappointments and uncertainties, and all is clear and full of encouragement. Use this world without abusing it. Weep as though you wept not. Rejoice

as though you rejoiced not, and though the fashion of it passeth away, you may have a building of God; a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

THE END.

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